

FED UP

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

F

B62F

TO THE READER

KINDLY use this book very carefully. If the book is disfigured or marked or written on while in your possession the book will have to be replaced by a new copy or paid for. In case the book be a volume of set of which single volumes are not available the price of the whole set will be realized.

AMARSINGH COLLEGE



Library

Checked
1976
81

Class No. F 823

Book No. B 62 F

Acc. No. 8805

~~See key~~
52

etc 123/2

22

7
4 2 1 3
2 0 8



621
Methuen's Colonial Library

FED UP

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SPANISH GOLD
THE BAD TIMES
THE SEARCH PARTY
LALAGE'S LOVERS
UP, THE REBELS!
INISHEENY
THE LOST LAWYER
THE GREAT-GRANDMOTHER
FOUND MONEY
THE ADVENTURES OF DR. WHITTY
THE ISLAND MYSTERY
GOOD CONDUCT
THE RUNAWAYS
THE MAJOR'S CANDLESTICKS
WILD JUSTICE
THE HYMN TUNE MYSTERY

SPILLIKINS
SHIPS AND SEALING-WAX
A WAYFARER IN HUNGARY

Com-05
Al. 00
45

FED UP

BY

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM



METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

Colonial Library

A. S. Collier
App. 2005
2005

F
B62 F

First Published in 1931

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

DEDICATION

TO LADY HORNER

MY DEAR LADY HORNER,—

I have long wished to dedicate one of my stories to you. I hesitated to ask permission because I felt that it might strain your side of a friendship, very precious to me, if your name were connected in any way with writing so foolishly flippant as mine. You cannot be expected to like my stories. You might very well feel aggrieved if one of them had your name on that additional title page which carries what is called the dedication.

Now at last I feel that the friendship—your side of it, mine is in no doubt—is strong enough to survive the offering to you of the very most foolish and flippant story I have ever written, even if it is about so serious a subject as English politics.

I am affectionately yours,

JAMES O. HANNAY

(GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM)

MELLS, 1931

FED UP

CHAPTER I

THE car stood on the gravel sweep in front of the dignified porch of Melcombe Court. Hodgkins, the chauffeur, stood beside it, eyeing it with strong disfavour. It was an open Dodge car, of great age and exceeding shabbiness. American cars do not mellow into respectability with the passing of years, as their English sisters do. They become violently disreputable, matter for contempt to good chauffeurs.

Hodgkins' verdict on this car was tersely expressed :

'I don't say as how it won't go,' he said, 'but whether it goes or not, you can't hardly call it a car.'

The opinion of Charles Beauchamp, the owner, was much the same. Accustomed to the glories of a large Daimler, and the swift delight of a two-seater Alvis, he disliked the battered vehicle which stood at his door with great intensity. Of those who had to do with the car, only Lady Edith had a good word to say for it. Lady Edith, daughter of the Earl of Eppington, and wife of Charles Beauchamp of Melcombe Court, was a lady with a strong sense of duty, a high feeling of patriotism, and an acute political intelligence. It was she who bought the car—for £30. It was she who insisted on using it. It was she who said

that it was exactly the car which Charles Beauchamp ought to own and drive.

It must not be supposed that Lady Edith was a victim of the vice of penuriousness. She enjoyed spending money as an earl's daughter should. As the wife of a rich man she could and did spend lavishly. There are women, some of them incredibly rich, who hate parting with a five-pound note, who will underfeed valuable hunters and underpay good servants rather than spend half their incomes. Lady Edith was not one of this sisterhood. Her furs were magnificent. Her maid was rapidly making a small fortune out of the frocks which her ladyship discarded. It was not a passion for economy which led her to buy the ancient Dodge. It was certainly no love for disreputable shabbiness which induced her to view its battered mudguards and chipped paint with high approval.

The car had been bought, against the will of Charles Beauchamp, and was used, in spite of his continued protests, because Lady Edith was passionately patriotic, and had, as has been said, an acute political intelligence.

England was at the time in the middle of a General Election. It was a season of great uncertainty. The party loyalty of even the most faithful constituencies was in doubt, and no one could guess what would happen in districts of wavering allegiance. The Mid-Southeaster Division was one of these. It had been represented in the old days sometimes by a Liberal, sometimes by a Conservative. Of late years it had once returned a Labour member. But there had never been a large majority for any one, and both the Conservatives and the Socialists—the Liberals had entirely disappeared—had hopes of winning.

Charles Beauchamp was asked by the local Conservative Association to stand as candidate for the division. He hated politics and liked a quiet life, so he promptly refused to do anything of the sort. He enclosed in his letter of refusal a cheque for £500 for the party funds, *danegelt* so handsome that it ought to have bought his freedom. The Conservative Association pocketed the £500 and, meanly enough, asked him to reconsider his decision. Lady Edith, hearing of the matter for the first time at this stage, reconsidered his decision for him.

‘At this crisis,’ she said to Charles, ‘when civilization is in the melting-pot and the future of the Empire is at the cross-roads—’ strong words, but she meant every one of them, ‘when the sanctity of the home is threatened and ruin stares our industrial supremacy in the face—’ she meant all that too, ‘it is the plain duty of young men of our class to take their places as leaders of the people.’

Charles had nothing effective to say in reply, and so, though he hated it bitterly, he became Conservative candidate for the division. His opponent was Mr. Peter Boyd, who stood for the cause of Socialism and appealed for the Labour vote.

Peter Boyd was by birth and early education an Irishman. At the age of sixteen he had drifted over to the mining district which forms part of the Mid-Southeaster division of the county. There he had worked for awhile and discovered that, like many of his countrymen, he had more natural aptitude for leadership than for manual toil. He had risen to an important position in his union, developing as he rose a talent for public speaking, a gift for popularity and an unfailing tact in handling difficult people. These

are valuable qualities, and Boyd was chosen as Labour candidate. He was generally known and affectionately spoken of as Big Peter Boyd. Sometimes more briefly, by those who loved him most, as Big Pete.

His friends and supporters believed, oddly enough, almost exactly what Lady Edith believed, though they expressed themselves differently. All that made life worth while, civilization in fact, was in the melting-pot. Homes were threatened, industry was being stared in the face by ruin, and so forth. Oddly enough too, Peter Boyd—the Big Pete of popular acclamation—felt about these things very much as Charles Beauchamp did, and like Charles Beauchamp, consented to become a candidate only because he had no effective answer to make to the appeal that young men of his class ought to take their proper places as leaders of the people.

The division is a wide one, chiefly agricultural, but containing some coal-pits with mining villages round them. Peter Boyd's strength was in these mining villages, though he often said that the plight of English agriculture moved him to tears and that only the triumph of the Socialists could save the farmers. Charles Beauchamp and his friends depended on the farmers and their labourers, but they said, not very hopefully, that the future of coal depended on the triumph of Conservatism.

The date of the General Election was fixed for June the 1st, and in the middle of May the business of persuading the electors to vote was in full swing. Peter Boyd was hard at work with the miners, holding meetings and making excellent speeches. Charles Beauchamp, goaded on by Lady Edith, toured the agricultural parts of the constituency, each party

adopting the excellent plan of preaching to those already converted and leaving those outside the fold to find their way to the truth as best they could.

It was when the work began that Lady Edith's flair for politics showed itself. She saw at once that the popular 'Big Peter' in front of Boyd's name gave him a distinct advantage. Her husband was merely Mr. Charles Beauchamp. She took counsel with Mr. Dodds, the astute Conservative agent. She invited the editor of *The Wessex Argus* to luncheon. She invited the editors of several minor papers to tea. She told them that in future her husband should be referred to as Cheerful Charlie. This was a clever thing to do, for cheerfulness is a quality which appeals strongly to the English people, and the alliteration was catchy. Unfortunately, though all the editors did their best, the plan did not work very well. Boyd's 'Big Peter' came naturally to every one, for he was six feet high, broad-shouldered and heavy. But Charles Beauchamp could never manage to look cheerful when face to face with his constituents. He usually appeared bored, often deeply depressed and sometimes puzzled. Even when he made a great effort to be hearty he only succeeded in looking, as indeed he felt, very silly. It was impossible to induce people to speak of him as 'Cheerful Charlie', though Lady Edith, a very persistent woman, did not give up the attempt.

Lady Edith also saw that it would never do to drive about the constituency in a Daimler and that the two-seater sports model Alvis would be even worse. A parade of wealth is fatal in a democratic society—that is to say of wealth spent selfishly on such things as motor-cars. Wealth may of course be paraded

without danger in the form of subscriptions to local charities, village flower shows and parish halls. Big Peter Boyd drove about in a 7-horse-power Austin, into which he squeezed himself with difficulty. Lady Edith bought a Dodge for £30, ran it into a gate to curl up its mudguards and left its paint as it was. Here she scored heavily over Peter Boyd. Many people had known him when he was a boy and did not see why he should have a car at all, even a Baby Austin, when they had none. It seemed more or less natural that Charles Beauchamp should have a car, and there was no haughty ostentation about the Dodge.

The Dodge stood on the gravel sweep before the door. Hodgkins, the chauffeur, stood beside it and sneered. Charles Beauchamp came out of the house, stood at the top of the steps and scowled.

There was every excuse for him. He had been forced to dine at half-past six, a detestable hour, and even so had been hurried. He was about to start for Pell Magna, a small village which he had never seen, and when he got there he had to make a speech to the inhabitants. He had to drive there in the Dodge.

'Beastly-looking thing, Hodgkins,' he said, referring of course to the Dodge.

'I don't say as how it won't go,' said Hodgkins, 'but you can't hardly call it a car.'

He had said that before, to his master, to her ladyship, to the head gardener, to every one in the servants' hall; but it was a good thing and Hodgkins was too wise to try to improve on it.

Lady Edith came out, beautifully dressed in a long pale fawn coat with an exquisite skirt showing underneath it. An expert in women's clothes would have recognized the garments as the creations of Madame

Tzaan, a lady who, besides being a Hungarian baroness, was admitted to have the best taste, the most exquisite skill and the highest prices of any dressmaker in London.

Charles eyed his wife with approval and wonder. She was more than usually good-looking, and when dressed as Madame Tzaan dressed her, deserved the admiration she got. But he wondered why she wore clothes which would have suited a Buckingham Palace Garden Party when she was going to an open-air political meeting in the little village of Pell Magna. Lady Edith, too much accustomed to admiration to notice it, answered the surprise in her husband's face.

'The poor darlings', she said, 'do so love to see pretty clothes. Drab lives, you know, and all that sort of thing. It's a plain duty to cheer them up as much as we can.'

She was thinking of the electors of Pell Magna whom Charles was to address, especially of their wives, who nowadays are also electors.

'I should have thought', said Charles, 'that it would have cheered them up more to see a decent car. That thing of yours', he pointed scornfully at the Dodge, 'would depress a Bank Holiday outing.'

'The flaunting of wealth in the face of the proletariat', said Lady Edith, 'is the surest way to make them vote Labour. Have you got your pipe?'

The inquiry seemed an abrupt change of subject. It might have been taken for an evidence of wifely solicitude for a husband's happiness. In reality it was neither one nor the other. It followed closely the line of thought which began with the Dodge car, and a pipe, as Lady Edith knew perfectly well, did not add to her husband's comfort. He was a smoker of

Turkish cigarettes of a fine brand, and of really good cigars. He detested pipes. He had never owned a pipe until he was compelled to seek the votes of the constituency. Since then he found it necessary not only to own a pipe, but to hold it between his teeth, sometimes actually to smoke it, in public, on the occasions of political meetings.

Our caricaturists who have endowed Mr. Winston Churchill with his hats, have established the fact that Mr. Baldwin smokes pipes incessantly. The thing has become a symbol of all that Mr. Baldwin and his party stand for in public life. Plain good sense without brains or dubious frills, simple honesty, friendliness, contempt for class arrogance, solidity, steadfastness of purpose and Britishness—above all Britishness. Does any other nation smoke briar pipes? If so it is only in imitation, envious imitation of the Briton. No Conservative candidate can afford to neglect the example of his leader. Charles found himself obliged to buy a pipe. Lady Edith chose it for him. Being a clever woman, with a real understanding of politics, she chose a cobby briar, aggressively honest and simple, of the kind appropriately called 'bull-dog' by tobacconists.

Charles pulled the thing out of his pocket and looked at it sadly.

'Hadn't you better light it, dear?' said Lady Edith.

'It will be time enough to light it', said Charles, 'when we get near the beastly place—if we ever do get near it in that thing.'

Hodgkins was working at the starting-handle of the Dodge, for the self-starter had long ago ceased to have any effect on the engine. He did not like the work,

but he did it and even spoke a good word for the car when he got the engine going.

'She'll get there all right,' he said, 'though she isn't hardly what I'd call a car.'

That ought to have comforted Charles a little, but did not because he could not hear what Hodgkins said. When the engine of the Dodge was running it was impossible to hear anything which was said, and if it was necessary to communicate with anybody, the only thing to do was to walk away, fifty yards or so, and then shout.

CHAPTER II

HODGKINS was right about the Dodge. It got there, went without a pause all the way to Pell Magna, a matter of twenty-five miles. Outside the village, Lady Edith, signalling vigorously because she could not make herself heard, insisted on a stop. She got rid of the veil which bound her hat to her head—the Dodge was an open car—painted her lips a little, gave a dab of powder to her nose and made Charles light the bull-dog pipe. Then, with a smile of good fellowship on her face, and a light of optimism in her eyes, expressions which her husband failed to imitate, she drove down the village street.

The Conservative van was already in place, on a patch of grass in the middle of the road, between the rectory gate and the church. The business of the Conservative van is to attract attention to the fact that a meeting is to be held. For this purpose it carries a gramophone with a loud-speaker attached to it. With these instruments it makes a noise, a great deal of noise. As the Beauchamps drew up 'The bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond' was plainly audible above the clamour of the Dodge's engine.

Colonel Enfield, of Pell Magna Manor House, was standing near the van, waiting to welcome Charles

Beauchamp. The Colonel was a staunch Conservative, so staunch that he had dined at seven o'clock instead of eight, in order to attend the meeting. Such are the sacrifices which our upper classes are ready to make for King and Country.

Beside him was the rector, less staunchly Conservative than the Colonel, because he had a grievance about Tithes, which the last Conservative Government might have dealt with but did not. He went to the meeting and intended to vote for Charles Beauchamp, partly because he liked to be on good terms with Colonel Enfield, and partly because he had always disliked the Labour Party. He had no political convictions, unless a violent hatred of the managers of Queen Anne's Bounty can be called political.

At a little distance, because social distinctions are maintained in Pell Magna, was Farmer Tuke, the Chairman of the meeting. There was no chair, for at these meetings everybody stands, but Farmer Tuke was indubitably a man. Thickset, vigorous and obstinate, he worked harder than any of his labourers, much harder than the fortunate members of trades whose hours are regulated by the Government and watched over by Unions.

As near as possible to the loud-speaker were ten small boys. They were the rector's choir boys, and ought at that hour to have been in the church learning to sing psalms and being nagged at by the organist. They had no particular interest in political meetings, but they felt that their support of the Conservative cause might be reckoned as righteousness and prove a sufficient excuse for shirking a choir practice. Listening to speeches is a dull business, but it is

better than trying to pronounce intelligibly words which are difficult enough even to read. Besides, there was the gramophone with its loud-speaker.

Near the rectory gate were five women, labourers' wives. Four of them had babies in prams. The fifth, Mrs. Muggridge, was apparently likely to have a baby to put in a pram in a month or two. Ishmael Sands, an elderly and grizzled man, the village carrier and the umpire in all the local cricket matches, leaned against the church gate at the opposite side of the road.

The Conservative van with its gramophone and its loud-speaker had justified its existence. It had gathered an audience for Charles Beauchamp. The people, the real people, voters and others, were there to hear and learn.

The Colonel, as was fitting, opened the proceedings by welcoming Mr. Charles Beauchamp and his charming wife to Pell Magna.

'I am not', said the Colonel, 'going to make a speech.'

Charles Beauchamp shivered slightly, and Lady Edith's smile lost its spontaneity. Long experience had taught them that men who begin by saying they are not going to make speeches invariably make very long ones. But Colonel Enfield was a pleasant exception to an almost universal rule. He said he hoped that the Income Tax would be reduced by two-and-sixpence in the pound when Mr. Beauchamp made his influence felt in Parliament.

'That', he added, 'will be an advantage to every one.'

He waved his hand, first towards the ten choir boys and then towards the five women at the rectory gate. None of them, boys or women, had any clear

idea what income tax was, but they all hoped that it would be reduced if what the Colonel said was true. An advantage to every one is plainly a desirable thing. After that the Colonel stopped speaking, though he could not of course sit down.

Farmer Tuke's turn came next. He assured the ten choir boys that he was a Conservative, which no one doubted. Turning to the five women he said with emphasis that he always had been a Conservative, a matter of common knowledge in the village which did not excite any one in the least. Ishmael Sands, still leaning against the church gate, was addressed next and told that Farmer Tuke always would be a Conservative. That left Charles Beauchamp in no doubt about how Farmer Tuke's vote would go. Lady Edith clapped her hands and tried to raise a cheer. Only the Colonel joined her. The boys, who were generally willing to cheer anybody or anything, remained silent in the hope that the gramophone in the van might be turned on again if the supply of noise seemed insufficient. But Farmer Tuke, though he had won his cheer, had not finished his speech.

'I've no more to say,' he went on, 'only this. There's too many inspectors going round, and I hope that when Mr. Beauchamp gets into Parliament he'll see that a few of them is done away with. How am I to go on producing milk'—here he addressed Charles Beauchamp directly—'when every time I cross my own yard I trip over an inspector?'

Charles Beauchamp rose to his feet. He mounted the seat on which he had been sitting, thus obtaining a commanding position but losing dignity. The cushions of the Dodge, though old, were springy,

and it is difficult to be dignified when every shift of weight from one foot to the other results in a little bound into the air. Charles Beauchamp, apart from his physical difficulties, was not comfortable. Though a candidate for Parliament, he was by no means a fool, and he knew that there was not the slightest chance, whatever party came into power, that the Colonel's income tax would be reduced. Indeed, he felt fairly certain that it would be raised, whoever ruled. He was equally certain that Farmer Tuke would in future be tripped up by more inspectors. Our political leaders differ about many things, but they agree about the desirability of inspecting the country more and more. It was thus impossible for Charles to touch either the Colonel's subject or Farmer Tuke's, and nobody else had expressed any opinions at all.

Charles, his pipe still in his mouth, blew three great blasts of tobacco smoke into the air. Lady Edith clapped vigorously, and said afterwards that the action had produced an excellent effect. Then, since not even a great leader can make a speech with a pipe in his mouth, Charles knocked out the remains of his tobacco and began.

He denounced Bolshevism. He praised the League of Nations, though without apparent conviction. He poured scorn on pessimists and said with great fervour that Old England was not yet down and out.

That seemed a safe thing to assert, something which no one would want to contradict. The interruption which followed was a surprise to Charles. It came from Ishmael Sands, still leaning against the church gate.

'What about Bradman?' he asked.

•

Charles, who had been addressing meetings for some weeks, was growing accustomed to interrupters, who nearly always say the same things. But no one had ever before interrupted him at this particular point in his speech, and no one had ever mentioned Bradman. Charles, at the moment, had not the slightest idea who Bradman was. He looked down at Lady Edith for help. It was very seldom that she failed to whisper some useful word. But the name of Bradman seemed to have no connexion whatever with the decay or survival of England.

Ishmael Sands became truculent.

‘I’m asking you, sir, and I’m expecting of an answer. What about Bradman?’

It was Colonel Enfield who came to the rescue. Stepping over to the car he whispered hurriedly:

‘Ishmael Sands, quite a good fellow really. Umpires at all the matches. Good bat when he was younger.’

The last words gave Charles the hint he needed. Bradman was the invincible Australian batsman who got the better of our bowlers in the Test Matches of 1930.

‘Bradman!’ he said. ‘I take off my hat to Bradman.’ He had already taken off his hat and Lady Edith was holding it in her lap. But every one knew what he meant. ‘Finest bat of our time. But if Bradman isn’t an Englishman his father was.’ This might possibly be true, and whether it was or not no one was likely to be able to contradict it. ‘Bradman is our first cousin, ladies and gentlemen. What he does is a credit to the family and a proof of what I’ve just said that Old England’s not down and out yet.’

But Ishmael Sands was undefeated.

‘That may be all right, what you say about Bradman,’ he said. ‘But what about Bobby Jones?’

This time Charles, his thoughts switched off from politics to games, was ready. But before he could claim Bobby Jones as an English-speaking Saxon or Celt, Farmer Tuke, the Chairman, came down heavily on the interrupter.

‘Now then, Ish,’ he said, ‘we’ve had about enough of you. This meeting isn’t here to discuss Bobby Jones. But I’ll just say this: If he’s another Welshman the same as Lloyd George, he’s not wanted in Pell Magna.’

Farmer Tuke was not a golfer, or even interested in that ancient game.

Charles’s speech wound its way to its appointed end, and, goaded by an urgent nod from the vicar, the ten choir boys cheered.

Farmer Tuke said that anybody who liked might ask questions of the candidate. He scowled heavily at Ishmael Sands to show that he was not included in the invitation. Mrs. Muggridge, the one of the five women who had not got a baby in a pram, stepped out from the group at the rectory gate.

‘I’d like to ask a question,’ she said.

Farmer Tuke looked at her with strong disapproval. Muggridge was one of his labourers, and in his experience any political activity on the part of a labourer brought forth—hatched as if from an egg—a fresh inspector to the further hindrance of the business of farming. A question asked by a labourer’s wife might very well have the same effect.

Colonel Enfield was more encouraging.

‘Certainly, Mrs. Muggridge,’ he said. ‘We’re all

here to ask questions, and our candidate, Mr. Beauchamp, is delighted to answer them.'

Charles Beauchamp was not quite sure about that. He was ready for questions about Free Trade, Imperial Preference, the League of Nations or even Widows' Pensions. But this Mrs. Muggridge might be another, a female Ishmael Sands, waiting to spring something quite unexpected on him. In that case he would not be delighted, only puzzled and embarrassed. He smiled feebly towards Mrs. Muggridge. Lady Edith did better.

'Do please ask your question,' she said. 'It'll be so interesting and we shall all love it. I do think that we women ought to take our proper place and to ask as many questions as the men do.'

Here she smiled at the Colonel, who disagreed with her about women's position but did not like to say so because she was Lady Edith. Mrs. Muggridge, greatly encouraged, asked her question.

'Is our Gladys to stay at school for another year?'

The only answer Charles Beauchamp could have given to that question was a short and simple one: 'I don't know.' If he had been quite honest he might have added: 'And I don't care.' If he had been polite instead of honest, as all parliamentary candidates should be, he might have said: 'And I hope the dear little thing will like it.' But he knew that questions cannot be answered truthfully by politicians and should only be answered politely when asked by assured supporters. The attitude of the meeting towards Mrs. Muggridge further puzzled him. Her question was the first thing which had awakened any sign of general interest. The Colonel greeted it with approval. 'Quite so, quite so,' he

said. Farmer Tuke said 'Hear, hear,' distinctly. The choir boys showed signs of intelligent attention.

The progress of Gladys Muggridge's education, though Charles Beauchamp did not know it, was a matter of some importance in Pell Magna. There had been some talk about her joining Colonel Enfield's household staff as scullery maid when she reached the age of 14 and could escape from school. Farmer Tuke had an eye on Gladys' brother, a likely lad, who might be useful on the farm a year later. The choir boys, some of them about 14, were beginning to look forward to their release from the tyranny of the school attendance officer. Mrs. Muggridge, encouraged by the general sympathy, went on.

'I'm the mother of nine,' she said, 'and I'm expecting my tenth next month, and I'd like to know how I'm going to feed them if Gladys isn't to be allowed to earn her keep, the same as I did, when I was younger than what she is. And I'd like to know where she's going to sleep, if she isn't to be allowed to go out to service, when there's only two bedrooms in the house, and Donald, who's next to her, is getting to be a big boy, and Harold, that's after him, is over twelve.'

'Quite so. Quite so,' said the Colonel approvingly.

He owned the Muggridge's two-bedroomed cottage, which he let to them at the low rent of two-and-sixpence a week.

'Hear, hear,' said Farmer Tuke warmly.

He paid the thirty-two shillings on which Mrs. Muggridge had to feed her family for seven days.

Charles Beauchamp understood at last what the question meant. He knew that the raising of the age for compulsory school attendance was a settled

thing. No Minister of any party, no combination of Ministers in a Cabinet, could possibly resist the pressure put on them by the Civil Service clerks concerned with education, the tribe of schoolmasters, and the economists, who hoped to solve the unemployment problem by keeping boys and girls out of what they called the 'Labour Market'. The opinion of Mrs. Muggridge and a few million women like her, the opinion of Colonel Enfield and his fellows, the opinion of Farmer Tuke and others like him, did not matter at all.

It was plainly undesirable to say this in Pell Magna. It was plainly dishonest to say anything else, and Charles Beauchamp was an exceptional man. He disliked lying.

'Mrs. Muggridge's question', he said, 'is one of those which involves a knowledge of domestic affairs denied to a mere man. Fortunately I have beside me a woman who, as a woman, is able to appreciate Mrs. Muggridge's problem and enter into Mrs. Muggridge's feelings in a way that I, a poor helpless man, never can. I shall ask Lady Edith to reply to the question.'

He stepped off the seat on which he was standing and sat down plump. He had got well out of a difficult position, and if he had put his wife into it, that was no more than she deserved. It was she who had let him in for this tiresome electioneering. It was she who dragged him out of his comfortable home evening after evening to make speeches in places like Pell Magna. It was she who insisted on his driving about the country in the abominable Dodge car. Very well, let her see how she would like answering questions.

Acc no 8805

Lady Edith stood up, smiling and confident. The opportunity had come for giving the 'poor darlings' the treat she had designed for them. She drew her coat round her, Madame Tzaan's exquisite creation, letting the folds hang in all their grace and beauty. She mounted the seat, displaying the lovely skirt—Madame Tzaan's masterpiece of artistry—displaying the stockings and shoes which toned so perfectly with the colour scheme of the costume.

Mrs. Muggridge's face softened, which shows how art and beauty make an irresistible appeal even to the most harassed souls. The other four women gaped in undisguised admiration. Farmer Tuke said 'Hear, hear,' once more, and Colonel Enfield, with a feeling that he could scarcely have explained, took off his hat.

Lady Edith addressed him first.

'Now, Colonel,' she said, 'I'm not speaking to you and you're not to listen, and dear Farmer Tuke mustn't listen either, and the rector must think of something else. And you boys must all shut your ears. And Mr. Ishmael——' But Ishmael Sands had gone away disgusted by Farmer Tuke's remarks about Bobby Jones. 'I'm talking to the women,' she went on. 'As a woman to women. Charles,' she bent over her husband, 'you're not to listen either. Do you know'—here she turned radiantly to the five women at the rectory gate, 'I think Mrs. Muggridge is a very lucky woman, and ought to be quite too happy and oh! so proud. I only wish I had nine children and was expecting a tenth.'

'Good God! Edith!?' said Charles, but fortunately nobody heard him.

'And I expect Gladys is a sweet little girl and so

helpful to her mother with the little ones. I'm sure she is, for that's the way Mrs. Muggridge has brought her up, to be a dear, good, unselfish little girl. And some day Gladys will be a mother herself, with a home of her own, and such sweet children, when Mrs. Muggridge and I have grown into grandmothers. That's what we're all looking forward to, isn't it? And that's why we're asking you all to vote for my husband so as to keep old England safe for mother, and grannie and darling Gladys, and all these nice boys. So you will vote for him, won't you?'

She paused with an appealing smile on her crimson lips.

'We'll vote for you, my lady,' said Mrs. Muggridge, voicing the feeling of the whole meeting.

'No, no,' said Lady Edith, 'not for me. For Charlie. Now then, three cheers for Charlie! Cheers for Cheerful Charlie. Hip, hip——'

'Edith,' said Charles appealingly, and then, since appeal was plainly futile, he muttered 'Great Scot!'

Nobody heard him, for the choir boys were shouting and the Colonel was clapping his hands and Farmer Tuke was waving his hat and Mrs. Muggridge was leading the women in shrill cries.

CHAPTER III

‘**T**HANK God that’s over, anyway,’ said Charles. ‘One more awful day done with. I wonder how many more there are before me.’

He had got safely home in the ancient Dodge, which was more than he expected. He was sitting in a deeply cushioned chair in the library of Melcombe Court. A decanter of good whisky and a siphon of soda-water were beside him on a small table. A box of cigars of his favourite kind was at his other elbow. He held in his hand a sandwich, one of a neat pile on a plate beside the whisky. It was delicately made, thin slices of bread with a layer of *pâté de foie gras* between them, a sandwich to be savoured by an epicure. Charles Beauchamp ate it wolfishly, cramming the whole thing into his mouth at once. Then he helped himself to three more, and, as if offended by their very thinness, ate all three at once.

For all the notice he took of their elegance and flavour they might as well have been slices of cold bacon fat set between slabs of stale bread.

It would be vain to pretend that Charles Beauchamp was a satisfactory candidate. He disliked the work which had to be done too heartily to do it well. But it must be admitted that he had a most efficient wife, and the local Conservative association no doubt took this into account when pressing their nomination on him.

Lady Edith sat at her writing-table, a glass of orange-juice beside her, a sandwich, no more than nibbled, between the thumb and first finger of her right hand. She too had driven fifty miles in the Dodge. She had attended the meeting at Pell Magna. She had made the only effective speech of the evening, but she was neither exhausted nor discouraged. Before her on the writing-table was a carefully kept engagement-book. With her left hand she was turning over a bundle of letters, neatly clipped together. She was dealing with the entries in the engagement-book.

‘I call it quite a successful meeting,’ she said. ‘That Muggridge woman with all the babies will certainly vote for you and all the other women in the village will follow her. Now, let’s see. To-morrow’s not a very busy day. You have a deputation of the East Corley Branch of the National Teachers’ Union to interview at five-thirty.’

‘Wanting their salaries raised, I suppose,’ said Charles. ‘What the deuce am I to say to them?’

Lady Edith bit a corner of her sandwich, and read through a letter.

‘They don’t say anything about their salaries,’ she said, ‘but there’s a lot about the dignity of their profession and social recognition.’

‘What on earth do they mean by that?’

‘Oh tea, I suppose. You’ll have to give them tea. I’ll tell Martin to get out piles of silver and the Crown Derby cups.’

‘Martin won’t like it,’ said Charles.

It was likely that Martin would dislike it very much. He was the butler at Melcombe Court and had old-fashioned views about rank and position. But Lady Edith took no account of Martin’s feelings. She was

working for a great cause. The prejudices of a servant should not be allowed to balk her.

'Then there's the distribution of prizes at the Conservative whist drive at Nether Pemberton,' she said. 'They say 10 p.m., but I should say half-past ten would be quite soon enough to be there. That's all there is to-morrow, so you can manage without me perfectly well.'

Charles sat up abruptly.

'Do you mean to say that you're going to leave me alone with those united teachers in the afternoon?'

'You'll be all right,' said Lady Edith.

'I shan't be,' said Charles. 'I shall make a mess of it. Hang it all, Edith, you said that if I took on this job you'd see me through. And now——'

Lady Edith sipped her orange-juice. Then she rose gracefully, crossed the room and patted Charles's head.

'Dearest one,' she said, 'I wouldn't go if I could help it. I'm enjoying every minute of this election, and even if I wasn't I wouldn't desert you. But poor father has another touch of his sciatica, and he says that I must come over for a couple of days and cheer him up by telling him how we're getting on. He loves elections, you know. So sweet of him, poor darling.'

'I wish he'd stand instead of me.'

'Don't be silly, my own. How can he when he's in the House of Lords?'

'If I'm ever in Parliament,' said Charles, 'I shall vote for the abolition of the House of Lords and then your father can stand instead of me at the next election. Why can't you stay and see me through the schoolmasters? I'm frightened of schoolmasters, always have been ever since I was a boy. I hate them and I simply won't promise to get their salaries raised.'

‘That’s not what they want. Do try not to be so forgetful, Charles. What they say in their letter is “social recognition”.’

‘Very well,’ said Charles vindictively, ‘they shall have it. If you go off to your father and leave me alone to be terrified into fits by armies of school-masters, I’ll promise that you’ll go round and call on all their wives. That’ll be social recognition, I suppose, and I hope you’ll like it.’

Lady Edith, who had gone back to her orange-juice, darted across the room again, and this time patted her husband’s cheek.

‘Darling,’ she said, ‘I always said that you are not nearly so stupid as you pretend to be! That’s a perfectly splendid idea and I never thought of it. But do put it tactfully, to each one separately. “By the way, Mr. Simpkins,” or whatever his name is, “Lady Edith asked me to say that she hopes to run over and see Mrs. Simpkins some day soon. I wonder if you could manage to give her tea?”’

‘But Great Scot! Edith, if I say that you’ll have to do it.’

‘Of course, and I will. Poor dears, it will be such a pleasure to them. But don’t spoil the whole thing by blurting it out to the entire deputation at once, as if it were an invitation to a parish tea. Tell each one separately and leave him to think that his wife is the only one I’m going to call on. That will give real pleasure and all the wives will vote for you.’

Charles had thrown what he hoped was a devastating bomb straight at his wife. The result was most disappointing. She caught the thing and tossed it into the air as if it had been—it seemed that it really was—an iridescent glass ball. That, at all events, was the

way she treated it. He growled, ate three more sandwiches, took a long drink and then lighted a cigar.

'Don't forget', said Lady Edith, 'that you've presented a prize to the Nether Pemberton whist drive. Here you are.'

She handed her husband a bright orange leaflet.

CONSERVATIVE WHIST DRIVE.

FIRST PRIZE (GENTS)—Silver Cigarette-lighter.

Presented by Charles Beauchamp, Esq.

'I never presented a silver cigarette-lighter to any one,' said Charles.

'I know you didn't, darling,' said Lady Edith, 'but somebody once gave one to you—a wedding present, I think—and when I told Martin to look out something for the Nether Pemberton people he found it and I sent it to the secretary.'

'What is Conservative whist, anyway?' said Charles.

'I haven't the slightest idea. Some kind of card game, I suppose. Perhaps it's something like ordinary whist. Anyhow, it doesn't matter, you haven't got to play. Only to distribute the prizes and make a little speech.'

'Speech! That reminds me, Edith. If ever you get up again and call me "Cheerful Charlie" at a public meeting I'll sue for a divorce. I'll do worse. I'll make a speech about you and call you "Elegant Edith".'

'They'll all love it if you do that, and it will show that you really love me, which would make the women vote for you more than anything. The poor darlings do like a good hubby.'

'Don't, Edith,' said Charles, shivering slightly. 'Not hubby if you can possibly help it.'

'Say it to the Conservative whist-drivers at Nether Pemberton,' she went on. 'You'll have to apologize for my absence, you know, so that will give you an opening. Then, as it's a whist drive, you can work in something about the queen of hearts—me, you know.'

'I couldn't,' said Charles. 'Queen of hearts! I really could not.'

'Always be topical if possible,' said Lady Edith. 'That's a sound rule. Then make eyes at the vicar's wife to show that you really mean it. Now don't say that you can't do that, for you can. She's quite a pretty little thing and I saw you flirting with her at the garden party when we invited all the clergy and their wives. Or am I thinking of another one?'

'I didn't flirt with any parson's wife,' said Charles, 'and I won't make eyes at one.'

'She'll love it, the poor sweet. Clergymen's wives get so little of that sort of thing. Of course it'll be rather waste in a way, for she's almost bound to vote for you in any case, being the vicar's wife. Still, I'm sure it will produce an excellent impression and the vicar will be pleased. There now. I've as good as given you your whole speech. "A silver cigarette-lighter for the winning gent. (be sure not to say gentleman), of exactly the same pattern as that given to me on my last birthday by my wife, who is deeply disappointed at not being here this evening. My wife, whom her friends call Elegant Edith, but who is to me something much more precious than that, who is my winning card, my best trump, my queen of hearts." Then look round at the vicar's wife. She is sure to be close beside you, roll your eyes a bit until you see her beginning to blush. Then say, "The game of life is better than the game of whist." I wonder if you ought

to say Conservative whist. Perhaps not. Better not risk it, though of course it would be a good touch if there is such a game as Conservative whist. "In whist only one player can hold the most precious card. In life, the greatest game of all, ladies and gents., each man can hold a Queen of Hearts." Then bow to the vicar, just to show that you didn't really mean to go too far with his wife.'

'Edith,' said Charles, 'I sometimes think that you've got the most thoroughly vulgar mind of any woman in England.'

'Darling, how sweet of you to say so ! It makes me feel that I really may get you into Parliament in the end. And that reminds me that Mr. Dodds is to call to-morrow morning at about eleven. He has a couple of suggestions to make.'

'I said the most vulgar mind of any *woman* in England. Dodds is a man, and if there's anything to choose between you he's the worse of the two.'

'But he is so efficient,' said Lady Edith.

That was quite true. As an election agent Mr. Dodds was perhaps unsurpassed anywhere in the Empire. His strongest point was the devising of what he called stunts. He has an intimate understanding of the mind of our great democracy and a talent for originating slogans. It was he who some years ago when the howl about dear food was at its height got Ambrose Sylvester returned for an industrial constituency. Sylvester was a singularly feeble candidate, but Dodds placarded the town with immense notices.

'Vote for Sylvester and then there'll be no talk of dear anything except dear Ambrose.'

He had already suggested for Charles Beauchamp's benefit a handbill which ran :

Beecham's pills are worth a guinea a box.
Beauchamp's poll is worth double that.
Beecham's pills for health.
Beauchamp's poll for prosperity.
Return Beauchamp and enjoy both.

'But', said Dodds, 'we can't issue that just yet. Half the constituency doesn't know your name is pronounced like the pill man's, and until everybody knows that the leaflets would fall flat.'

Charles was greatly afraid that the time had now come when most voters knew that the B-e-a-u in his name was pronounced Bee. He disliked the issue of the pill leaflet even more than having to refer to Lady Edith as his queen of hearts while making eyes at the wife of the vicar of Nether Pemberton. And Dodds, in all probability, had several other brilliant plans to submit to him for approval.

Lady Edith yawned.

'Dearest one,' she said, 'I'm half dead with sleepiness and you'd be far better in bed. Don't sit up brooding over imaginary grievances.'

'I wish they were imaginary,' said Charles. 'I'd give a thousand pounds cheerfully to anyone who would contest this beastly election instead of me. I wonder if Lord Beaverbrook would take the money and run a man.'

'Lord Beaverbrook doesn't want your thousand pounds. He has as much money as he knows what to do with already.'

'I suppose he has,' said Charles despairingly.

CHAPTER IV

HOLYCROFT ST. MARY is the full name of a village which perhaps deserves to be called a small town. In an age which supposes itself to be hurried men have no time to waste over six-syllabled names. By general consent of the inhabitants the St. Mary part of the name has been dropped. Very likely this deletion of her name meets with the approval of the saint herself, whichever of the various canonized Marys she may be. It cannot be supposed that any holy lady would care to be associated with a town so irredeemably ugly as this Holycroft. Once things may have been different, and St. Mary—any St. Mary—may have liked her Holycroft. She must, one may suppose, have liked the name which is singularly beautiful.

There was once an Indian Civil Servant who after many years of toil abroad found that he was entitled to a pension and might return to live in England if he liked. He had been so long in India that he had no points of attachment at home and was free to settle down for the remainder of his life anywhere at all. He was a man of romantic mind, quiet habits and vague memories of a boyhood spent in a country rectory. He wanted for his new home 'a haunt of ancient peace', so he said, for he read Tennyson, a village fragrant with simple life, with venerable traditions, with cows which lowed, hawthorn hedges, church bells, and so forth.

While gazing at a map one day he came on the name of Holycroft St. Mary, and immediately said, 'That is the place for me.' And indeed it seemed as if it must be what he wanted. The very sound of the syllables suggested the scent of dried lavender.

That Anglo-Indian met with a bitter disappointment and very soon fled from Holycroft, sacrificing the greater part of his rights under a lease which he had incautiously signed.

The place is a mining village, lying low in a dip of the hills. To right and left of its sordid streets rise huge mounds of slag, the abominable debris of the work of bringing coal to the surface. Tall, blackened chimneys poke up towards a sky usually darkened by the clouds of smoke which they emit. The slag-heaps ooze more smoke. Railway engines, pushing trucks up narrow sidings, belch smoke. Seven hundred little houses have among them a thousand chimneys, and these all smoke. At certain hours of the day and night crowds of coal-grimed men troop along the streets. Women of small beauty but immense vitality drive herds of children forth to a smoke-stained school, prepare dinners against the hour of their children's return, endlessly wash sheets, towels, garments, and hang them out shamelessly in the smoky air. They heat water for the baths of the grimed men who return to them. They rise from bed at unhallowed hours of the night to send their men forth to work, work which is arranged in shifts with small regard for the comfort or convenience of the workers. They move carefully among their household goods lest they should waken the men in from the night shifts who must sleep by day.

In the middle of the town among the huddled houses, is the church, once the tiny and beautiful shrine of

St. Mary of the Holycroft, where country folk gathered of a Sunday. Now, restored and enlarged, it is cheaply grandiose, a monument to the zeal of a departed vicar, out of whose life peace went when the first pit opened, who strove hard, much against his inclination, to provide for the spiritual needs of a quickly growing population.

Opposite the church is a great Methodist chapel, aping the ecclesiastical, with crosses on its gable ends, more cheaply grandiose, even uglier than the enlarged church. In corners here and there are obscurer shrines, where Baptists gather, Congregationalists proclaim their spiritual independence, and Christadelphians declare themselves to be the brothers of each other and of Christ. The superintendents of five Sunday Schools offer bribes, prizes, summer outings and winter feasts, to secure the glory of feeding the lambs of the Holycroft which was once St. Mary's. Harvest Festival bids against Harvest Festival to attract the older sheep, while on week-days, 'socials', whist drives, jumble sales and—the Church alone is in the position to accomplish these—garden fêtes, win from the people the money by means of which religion is kept alive.

Near the church, occupying the space of twenty houses, is the shop—or something better than a shop, the establishment—or better still, for it deserves the finest name there is—the Emporium of the Holycroft Co-operative Society. Through its plate-glass windows the people of Holycroft can survey suites of furniture, dress fabrics, boots, hardware, jam-pots built up into towers, highly coloured cardboard packets of all manner of cereal foods, cooked or half cooked, boasting that their contents require little or no digestion. Through

the same windows they can read notices which announce the hugeness of the dividends paid by the society to its members and most attractive statements about the Co-operative Wholesale Society's tea, tobacco, boots and bicycles.

Above the emporium, reached by a staircase behind the grocery counter, are the committee rooms of Mr. Peter Boyd. There is, in fact, only one room. But the word is printed in the plural at the head of the notepaper on which Mr. Boyd and his agent write their letters. 'Rooms' seems somehow more impressive, more suggestive of ultimate success than 'Room'. It is not even a large room. When Mr. Peter Boyd, who is not called 'Big Peter' without reason, and his agent, Comrade Jack Hurst, are both in it, there is not much room for other comrades.

Here, one at each side of a small table, sat Peter Boyd and Comrade Hurst with a great pile of letters between them. They were opening letters, ill-spelt very often, almost always ill-expressed, written on various kinds of paper but in script which varied very little. It is one of the triumphs of our educationists that they have almost standardized the handwriting of the community. Character and illegibility survive only in the writing of those who, owing to their parents' snobbish preference for famous schools, have never been properly educated. Our great democracy, ground through the mill of Board schools and County schools, write so exactly alike that it is seldom possible, without a glance at the signature, to discover whether their letters come from men or women.

But it was not only the script of Boyd's correspondence which was monotonous. There was a sameness, an exhausting and irritating sameness about the

subject-matter of the letters. Every single writer had a grievance and every one of them expected Boyd to set things right at once. There was a miner who thought that the manager of the pit in which he worked ought to be dismissed at once, and—the last part of his letter was a little incoherent, but he seemed to think that the manager ought to be hanged after dismissal. There was a widow who had been unjustly deprived of a pension which she felt certain could be got for her by Comrade Boyd, who was, no doubt, 'in with' the higher officials of the Civil Service. There were three men who had been soldiers during the War but now had rheumatism. Two of them wanted pensions. The third preferred a lump sum down with which to start a business. He was a practical man and had thought things out. He felt sure that he could prosper, in spite of his rheumatism, if he was set up with a couple of petrol pumps 'in a good pitch'. There was an indignant mother who wanted some one, perhaps the Prime Minister, to announce publicly that her Pamela was to be allowed to wear a silver bangle in school 'which is what her daddy brought her the time the Co-op. outing went to Weymouth'. A tyrannous schoolmistress had punished Pamela for 'the wearing of jewellery, which is what no child of mine ever did, nor couldn't, when, what with the club payments and the National Health Insurance and one thing on top of another, there was only 35s. coming into the house at the end of the week'.

Charles Beauchamp in Melcombe Court was at that moment arguing with Dodds about the 'Beecham's Pills—Beauchamp's Poll' leaflet. Lady Edith, driven by Hodgkins in the Daimler, was speeding towards Tatterton Chase to report the progress of the candi-

dates to her father, the sciatic earl. Peter Boyd and Comrade Hurst were answering letters. England may, as some say, be declining rapidly into the position of a second-rate power, but the blame does not lie with her political leaders. They, at all events, are working hard.

‘Where’s Pell Magna?’ said Boyd.

‘Little village down Menton way,’ said Comrade Hurst.

‘They want a water supply,’ said Boyd, struggling with the bad handwriting of a long letter.

‘Let them go to hell for it,’ said Comrade Hurst.

He had been a local preacher among the Methodists, and therefore more or less in Holy Orders, but his language was often abrupt and he sometimes spoke hurriedly without proper thought. If he had considered the grievance of Pell Magna more carefully he would have known that hell is the last place in which they should look for what they wanted. But there are excuses to be made for him. He was at that moment trying to suggest to the rheumatic soldier that he would get his petrol pumps if a Labour Government came into power. He was trying to suggest it in such a way that afterwards, if the letter were ever produced, he would be able to show that he told the rheumatic soldier that he would not get the petrol pumps. This is not an easy kind of letter to write and Comrade Hurst felt the difficulty acutely. Yet he found time to explain to Boyd why the people of Pell Magna should go to hell without even a civil answer to their letter to take with them.

‘They’ll vote Conservative, anyway,’ he said, ‘whatever you promise them.’

‘I never can see’, said Boyd, ‘what people want such a lot of water for. Washing’s overdone in this country,

and surely to goodness nobody wants to drink the stuff. All the same, we ought to be able to raise a nasty stink over this Pell Magna case. The squire won't do a thing. The parson says the village pump was good enough for their fathers and ought to be good enough for them. I daresay it would too, only that the damned thing has run dry.'

'You can't get them a water supply,' said Comrade Hurst. 'And if you could, why should you? I know these village people. A rotten lot. If you gave them all Old Age Pensions at thirty-five they'd take them without saying thank you and vote Conservative again the next time they got the chance.'

Boyd sighed. He knew that, whether he went to Parliament or not, he could not get a water supply for Pell Magna. He knew well enough that the people would vote Conservative whatever he said to them or did for them. He quite honestly believed that they would be just as happy without water as with it, but though he had a clear head he had a tender heart. He felt sorry for women who had to go a mile and a half for a bucketful of water, and then, lest they should have to carry another bucket another three miles, wash their babies in the same water in which they had washed the family clothes. It was silly, of course, to wash either babies or clothes as these English villagers did; but since they were evidently foolish——

'I'll answer this myself,' he said, meaning to send a message to Pell Magna less abrupt than Hurst's 'go to hell'.

Hurst had finished with the rheumatic soldier and opened another letter.

'This school age stunt', he said, 'is going to lose us more votes than it gains.'

‘Education’, said Boyd, ‘is all my eye and Betty Martin.’

He had been a long time in England, but had never lost his native fondness for vigorous phrase.

‘Education has nothing to do with it,’ said Hurst, who was a realist. ‘The men want the school age raised because they think there’ll be more jobs going if there aren’t so many boys. The trouble is that the women damned well hate it and nowadays there are as many women voters as men.’

‘Anyway,’ said Boyd, ‘what does it matter? The Conservatives are just as much committed to it as we are.’

‘But they don’t gas about it the way we do,’ said Hurst. ‘They’ve sense enough to keep their mouths shut. So even if it’s them who passes it in the end, we’ll get the blame. Here’s a woman writing to us——’

The woman, though the wife of a miner and not a farm labourer, had written very much what Mrs. Muggridge tried to say at the meeting at Pell Magna. But here was no Lady Edith in a coat and skirt made by Madame Tzaan to make reply. Hurst felt the difficulty, felt it far more than Boyd did. Though a political realist, there was in the back of his mind a curious belief that schooling is good for children and that the more they get of it the happier they will be. Even clear-headed men have the oddest faith in education if they happen to have little or none themselves. That was Hurst’s position. If it had been his lot to pass through Winchester and New College he might have thought quite differently about education, for men are inclined to set a low value on what they themselves possess and to regard as desirable what others have and they have not.

‘What I’d like to see’, said Boyd, ‘would be a good cut in teachers’ salaries. Those fellows work shorter hours, have longer holidays, and get better pay than any one else in the country.’

This was a most uncomradely sentiment, for teachers, by establishing the strongest of all trades unions, have definitely ranged themselves with aspiring labour. Hurst could not possibly be expected to agree with his leader. He paused, hoping that Boyd would never repeat, outside the committee room, what he had just said.

But though he could not agree with Boyd about the teachers’ salaries, which after all are paid out of rates and taxes and so cost nobody anything—he had his own grievance against the teachers.

‘They’re getting swelled heads,’ he said; ‘too much of the gent about them.’

He had no doubt heard of the demand for social recognition. He had perhaps suffered slightly—or if he had not his wife had—from the tendency of teachers to become ‘gents’. Boyd, who was not married, felt far less keenly about ‘social recognition’. If a man was fool enough to make himself unhappy by wanting to dine with Charles Beauchamp or Lord Eppington, that was his affair and Boyd was untroubled about it.

‘After all,’ he said, ‘lots of them are decent fellows. If they’re paid too much, isn’t that what we’d all like if we could get it? As for their putting on silly side—why shouldn’t they if they like? It’s not my idea of a happy life, but there you are. Every fellow must go his own way, only I wish to goodness they wouldn’t queer the pitch with all this mucky rot about raising the school age. The life of a candidate for election is hard enough without that, and I’m just as sorry for

Beauchamp as I am for myself. Elections ought to be run plain and honest without dragging in beastly red herrings.'

Comrade Hurst might have had more to say about the social ambitions of teachers, but his attention was diverted from the subject by a noise, indeed several noises, in the street outside. There was a loud hooting of a powerful motor-horn and the shriek of brakes applied too suddenly and too hard. There was a yell from a child's voice and then the clamour of a man cursing loudly and bitterly.

Comrade Hurst left the table and went to the window to see what was happening.

CHAPTER V

THERE are two ways from Melcombe Court to Tatterton Chase, Lady Edith's home before she married, still the home of the sciatic earl, her father. The one way goes winding through pleasant country lanes, up and down steep hills, where the roads have hairpin bends in them. This way is picturesque and pleasant, but Hodgkins, the chauffeur, does not like it. It is not suitable to the pace at which he likes to drive the big Daimler. The other way is shorter. The road is better. The hills are fewer, but it leads through a series of squalid mining villages, and half-way along it is Holycroft St. Mary. Lady Edith dislikes this route, but Hodgkins prefers it. It is the way he takes unless he gets distinct orders to the contrary.

Hodgkins is a skilful and very careful driver. He goes fast when speed is safe. He drops to a mere twenty miles an hour in the streets of villages. But all of us, even the most skilful and cautious, are sometimes the victims of incalculable luck. Hodgkins, when he drove Lady Edith to Tatterton Chase on the day after the Pell Magna meeting, was unfortunate. He was held up, reduced to a mere crawl on the very best stretch of road, by a lorry laden with milk cans which refused to pull over to its own side. Hodgkins hooted in vain. The milk cans' rattling made all other

noise inaudible, and the lorry driver had no mirror in which to see what came behind him.

Then, having at length got past the lorry, Hodgkins reached Holycroft St. Mary at the very moment when the streets were most crowded. The hooters of the various mines had sounded. The men of the morning shift, grimed and weary, had been hauled up to the surface. They were hurrying home to dinner and baths, some on bicycles, some on foot, all using the roadway in preference to the side-walks. At the same time the children, released for an hour, burst like a torrent through the gates of their playground, and going in every direction, spread themselves all over the streets, running, shouting, laughing, throwing balls, and after the manner of children, progressing backwards, with no eyes for anything which came along the road.

Hodgkins slowed down, driving with his foot on the brake and ready for a sudden stop. He sounded his horn loudly and repeatedly. The Daimler, all shining paint work, glittering plate and clear glass, crept among the men's cycles, the men who walked and the running children. The car's progress, save for the shouts of the horn, was as silent as the passing of a ghost.

On the footpath walked Dick Nye, grimed with coal like all his fellows. He was a tall man and cadaverously thin. He walked with stooped shoulders and head thrust forward. Now and then he coughed, deeply, hoarsely—a cough of old standing this of Dick Nye's, a cough for which the coming of summer brought no cure, a cough which came from his lungs, the symptom of that miner's phthisis for which there is no remedy. At Dick Nye's heels walked a white terrier.

On the other side of the road, running with the school

children, was Alfred Nye, a boy of nine years old. He caught sight of his father and shouted 'Dad, Dad!' He rushed out to cross the road. Hodgkins' horn sounded its alarm. Hodgkins' foot pressed the brake pedal. The child paused, then turned, and darted back, reaching the footpath from which he had started. Hodgkins lifted his foot from the pedal. The Daimler glided on.

The terrier at Nye's heel caught sight of the child and yelped with joy. He made a spring into the road, right under the wheels of the car. Hodgkins jammed his foot on the brake pedal with all his force. The brakes shrieked. There was a soft thud, and the dog lay dead. The boy screamed and ran out. He picked up the dog in his arms. He wailed, 'Oh, Nipper, Nipper, are you dead?' Dick Nye walked over to where the child stood. He cursed. Cursed Hodgkins and then coughed. Cursed the car and coughed again. Cursed Lady Edith who sat among her cushions and bent himself double in an overwhelming fit of coughing.

'An accident,' said Comrade Hurst at the window of the committee room; 'only a dog run over I think. I'd better go and see.'

Peter Boyd followed him down the stairs, through the shop and into the street, where a crowd had gathered round the car. Dick Nye was still cursing and coughing. The child was crying, his face bent over the dead dog in his arms. The car stood still. Hodgkins, half turned, leaned back to receive instructions from his mistress.

'Here, Nye,' said Hurst, 'don't make a row in the street. Go inside. We'll see you right. Boyd, get him away, will you? We don't want the police butting in.'

Boyd took the man by the arm. He laid his great hand on the boy's shoulder. He took them with him into the shop.

'Now then,' said Hurst, 'what happened?'

The men who had gathered round the car were willing enough to tell the story and to give their opinions.

'Them there big cars didn't ought to be allowed in a place like this.'

'And the children coming out of school and all.'

'Just when the men were up from the pit.'

'Bound to be an accident sooner or later.'

But a crowd of Englishmen, however deeply moved by pity or a sense of injury, seldom fails to be just. The worship of fairness, which is the real religion of the race, is stronger than any passion.

'But I wouldn't say it was the chauffeur fellow's fault,' said some one.

'He done what he could.'

'It were an accident, plum and plain.'

Hodgkins, a little white though his face was steady, stepped out of the car. He addressed Hurst.

'Her ladyship says', he said, 'that if five pounds will pay for the dog——'

'Come in with me,' said Hurst.

The terrier, when alive, might perhaps have been worth five shillings if any one had wanted such a creature. Five pounds was an utterly extravagant offer of compensation, and five pounds would be very useful in the house of Dick Nye.

Hodgkins followed Hurst into the shop.

'Her ladyship wished me to say', he said, 'that she's very sorry for the accident and if five pounds is accept-

able by way of compensation she's willing to give it at once.'

Dick Nye turned on him with a fierce scowl.

'You damned smooth-tongued lackey!' he said. 'You——'

Then his cough stopped him.

'Steady, Nye, steady,' said Boyd. 'There's no sense in talking that way.'

Hodgkins kept his temper.

'I'm as sorry for what happened as any man can be,' he said. 'But it wasn't my fault. It wasn't anybody's fault. The little dog was right under the wheels and nothing could have saved him. It's just God's mercy that it wasn't the child.'

'Get away to hell out of this,' said Nye. 'You and your God's mercy! God! If there was a God you wouldn't be here.'

Hodgkins turned to the child, who was weeping quietly.

'Here,' he said, 'be a good kid and stop crying. I've got a pup at home, a well-bred one, with a black patch over the right eye, as good a pup as ever you saw, and he's yours now. That', he said, turning to Boyd, 'is in addition to the five pounds her ladyship is offering by way of compensation.'

'Well bred!' said Nye. 'Aye, likely he's well bred, when he's bred by a lackey in the house of a painted Jezebel. And well fed too, as well fed as what you are with the titbits your mistress throws to you.'

Then Lady Edith, radiant, exquisite, came into the shop.

She knew—the thought occurred to her almost at once—that nothing could be worse for her husband's prospect of winning votes than an incident like this.

The running over of a poor man's dog by a particularly splendid Daimler car savoured strongly of the stories told of days just before the French Revolution, when the equipages of aristocrats knocked down peasants on the roads. But it was not of the election and the votes that Lady Edith was thinking when she left her car and went into the shop. She had seen the dead dog in the arms of little Alfred Nye, and she was fond of dogs. She had heard the child's first scream and seen his weeping. There were tears in her own eyes. She had been moved to a strange pity for Dick Nye when she heard the deep bitterness with which he cursed her.

'I'd like', she said, 'to do anything I can, to give anything I can, to make up for this dreadful accident.'

'Keep your cursed money,' said Nye. 'Keep it to buy more cars like that one and more servants to fawn on you, and more paint for your face and more silks for your body. Your money will buy all that for you, but it will not buy the soul of an honest man.'

'Don't be a fool, Nye,' said Boyd. 'Nobody wants to buy your soul.'

'Oh, she's bought you too, has she?' said Nye. 'I always knew it. Calling yourself a Socialist, asking for the support of working men! You're a parasite, like that lackey there, ready to lick the boots of the *bourgeoisie* for the sake of what they'll give you.'

'Shut your mouth, Dick Nye,' said Hurst.

Lady Edith sat down on a chair which stood near the counter. She pulled little Alfred Nye over to her. She took him, dead dog and all, on her knee. His face was slobbered with tears. It had patches of blood on it here and there, where he had rubbed his cheeks against the dog's head. But Lady Edith kissed him.

‘Don’t cry, little boy,’ she said. ‘Don’t cry any more. You shall have another doggie, ever such a nice doggie, with long silky ears, and you shall come and see me in a beautiful house, and play in a beautiful garden, and eat cherries and cakes all day. Don’t cry any more.’

Then she kissed him again, kissed him three or four times, and these were not the kisses of the electioneering jokes. They were the kisses of a woman sorry for a child in trouble.

‘Curse you,’ said Nye. ‘You killed my dog. Do you want to take my child from me too?’

‘I think’, said Boyd to Lady Edith, ‘that you’d better leave it in my hands. You’ll do no good by staying here.’

A little group of men stood in the door of the shop. Boyd pushed through them and made way for Lady Edith. Hodgkins followed. At the door of the car she pressed ten pounds into Boyd’s hand.

‘Use it for them as best you can,’ she said, ‘and ask me for more if you want it. You know who I am—Lady Edith Beauchamp.’

‘It weren’t your fault, lady,’ said a man.

‘You treated him fair,’ said another.

There was a little cheer, and a woman called out ‘God bless you!’

The car slipped away. Lady Edith lay back among her cushions. She felt sorry for Nye, sorry for the child, sorry for the dog, but she could not help reflecting, with a glow of self-congratulation, that she had got well out of what might have been an awkward business. Charles’s chances of election were not injured. If anything they were slightly improved. The miners of Holycroft St. Mary would feel kindly towards her in the

future. And if they felt kindly towards her they would not be too bitterly intent on whipping up voters against Charles. After all, good might come out of what looked like unmitigated evil. Lady Edith, not for the first time in her life, congratulated herself on her tact. She certainly possessed the knack of managing people, especially 'the people' 'poor dear things'. With a handkerchief dipped in eau-de-Cologne, a powder-puff and a lipstick, she set to work to remove the marks of the kisses pressed on Alfred Nye's slobbered cheeks.

Boyd went back to the shop.

'Look here, Nye,' he said. 'I'm sorry for you and so's everybody else. But the thing was an accident and there's no sense in getting mad about it. You can slang me as much as you like. I don't mind a bit, but you ought to keep a civil tongue in your head when you are talking to a lady who wanted to do the best she could to help you.'

'Blast her help,' said Nye, 'and blast her, and every other like her! She killed the dog, didn't she? Well, that's enough for me. It was our Alf's little dog. It was all he had to love and he loved it.'

He took the child by the arm and led him away.

'Now what the devil is one to do with a fellow like that?' said Boyd.

He and Comrade Hurst were in their committee room again with their pile of letters before them.

'Oh, Dick Nye doesn't matter,' said Hurst. 'He wouldn't have voted for you in any case. He calls himself a Communist.'

'It's not his vote I'm thinking of.'

'There aren't above a dozen more like him among the men,' said Hurst. 'You've no need to worry about

them. It's not going to be such a close thing as all that.'

'I'm thinking of the man himself,' said Boyd. 'Did you hear him coughing?'

'Miner's phthisis. You can't cure that. Not but what that ten pounds will make things easier for him, if we can get him to take it. We'll try his wife. She'll see the value of the money if he doesn't. And now, as we're on the subject, it mightn't be a bad thing if you were to say in your speech to-night that you mean to bring in a Bill compelling the owners to pay compensation for any man who dies of miner's phthisis. The men will like it and the owners won't. It's a good fighting proposition and we want something of the sort, something plain and straight that everybody understands the meaning of.'

'Compensation is no use to a man when he's dead.'

'It's use to his widow, though, and it's the wives we want to get at. After the way that damned woman behaved to-day, kissing Dick Nye's boy and sitting him on her lap, I shouldn't wonder if some of the women here may not take it into their heads to vote for her husband. That sort of thing goes down surprisingly with the women. They're all in favour of anybody who slobbers over the kids.'

'All right,' said Boyd. 'I'll do it.'

He was ready enough to start an attack on miner's phthisis at the meeting he was to address in Stilldown that night. He was by no means comfortable or happy about that particular meeting, for he knew that the views of the United Chapel Ministers' Association on the closing of public-houses were to be put forward by the Chairman, the Rev. Jeremy King. The views of the United Chapel Ministers were not Boyd's views. He

was perfectly certain that they were not the views of most men, but chapel ministers, especially when united, possess a good deal of influence in mining villages, and their views might easily become the views of many women. The position had been made nakedly plain by Comrade Hurst, and Boyd was conscious that he would have to walk very warily indeed. It was just possible that a violent denunciation of the mine-owners as the originators and propagators of phthisis might divert the attention of the meeting from the public-house question.

Peter Boyd sighed. He was a man who preferred straight ways to tortuous, liked saying what he meant and hated telling lies. But like Charles Beauchamp, who shared these tastes and distastes with him, he had been dragged into politics.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLES BEAUCHAMP was in a fretful mood when he arrived at Nether Pemberton to distribute the prizes to Conservative whist-drivers. The four members of the deputation of the National Teachers' Union, though outwardly civil, were chilly and stood very much on their dignity. Tea out of an enormous silver teapot, watered from a silver kettle which stood on a chased silver tray, failed to soften them into friendliness. Charles whispered Lady Edith's promise of a call into the ears of two of the four, and this made the other two so suspicious that it became impossible to whisper anything to them. Even the two who received the precious message were more offended than pleased. One of them was a bachelor. The other had been a widower for eight years. They both thought that Mr. Beauchamp should have known all about their domestic affairs. The other two, who had wives, might have been pleased, if Charles had been lucky enough to hit on them first. If only his wife had been there, he reflected irritably, things would have been much better managed. The Dodge, when the time came for the drive to Nether Pemberton, behaved abominably. It did not actually stop. Charles would have been quite pleased if it had. He could then have telephoned an apology and alleged, quite truth-

fully, a motor breakdown as an excuse for not appearing. But the thing did not stop. It travelled with excessive noisiness, continual back-firing, and a stiffness in the gear-box which resulted in shattering crashes at every change.

The Nether Pemberton Conservatives, when he reached the schoolroom in which they drove their whist, were behind time. The vicar, who was acting as master of the ceremonies, explained to Charles that they had still four more hands to play. There was a wait of half an hour, and Charles heard the whole story of a feud between the vicar and his bell-ringers. It had begun six years before, and was likely to go on, so Charles gathered, until the last trump took the place of bells in reminding people of religion.

When the last hand was played and the winning Conservatives had made their final change of place, Charles became hopeful of getting away. He was disappointed. Another half-hour was spent in adding up the score cards. The organist had managed to get his total wrong. The schoolmaster, the best arithmetician in the parish, discovered the mistake. This annoyed the organist so much that he insisted on having all the other cards added up, maintaining that if he had made a mistake, everyone else must have made one too.

When the time for the actual prize-giving had arrived, Charles made a bad mess of his speech. He forgot to apologize for Lady Edith's absence, and it was that apology which should have given him his cue for his remarks about the queen of hearts. He succeeded in dragging her in, as it were with violence, by the hair of her head. But she failed to produce

the effect intended by Lady Edith, because no one could see what she had to do with the rest of the speech. When he turned to make eyes (as planned), he found that the lady on his right was not the vicar's pretty wife, but an elderly spinster, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Women's Institute. Charles did his best, but the surprise he felt may have taken some of the sweetness out of his glances. The lady received them with an uncomprehending glare, the same glare with which she had listened to his stumbling references to the queen of hearts. She had long passed the age at which hearts were of any interest to her, except as organs subject to occasional palpitations. Eyes, for her, were nothing but troublesome things which needed spectacles if they were to be of any use. Charles left Nether Pemberton school-house in a mood of great despondency.

Peter Boyd was no more fortunate that evening than Charles Beauchamp was. The people of Still-down were uninterested in the question of compensation for deaths from miner's phthisis. Their pit was singularly free from the silica which occasions the disease, and no single death from this cause had ever taken place among them. On the other hand, the member of the United Chapel Ministers' Association, who took the chair, was a forceful man, and had around him on the platform six other ministers, all equally forceful. They succeeded in bringing what they called the 'Temperance Question' to the front and keeping it there. The audience was bored and Boyd was embarrassed. That, perhaps, was what the ministers hoped to bring about.

Boyd was not so much despondent as angry when he got into his Baby Austin for the drive home. He had been worried all day. Indeed, that day had been only the latest of many filled with worry which at times became actual torment, even to a man of his buoyant temperament. The meeting at Stilldown, and the persistent nagging of the United Chapel ministers was the latest pang of a gnawing toothache, the latest, but in all likelihood not the last. Boyd saw a long stretch of such annoyances before him and cursed the day on which he consented to become a Labour candidate.

Charles Beauchamp, racketing along in the Dodge, cursed his day despairingly, and, as men say who propose toasts, 'coupled' the name of his wife with his own misery. It was she who had forced him to become a Conservative candidate. Peter Boyd also coupled a name with his curse, the name of Hurst, Comrade Hurst, who had persuaded him to seek a place in Parliament. If there had to be a Labour candidate—Boyd saw no reason why there should be, or why there should be a Conservative, or a Liberal, or any other candidate. But if such a person had to be, why could not Hurst have taken on the job himself? Damn Hurst!

Nature combined with man and his affairs to complete the rage and misery of the two candidates. While the Conservatives at Nether Pemberton were driving their whist, while the chapel ministers at Stilldown were denouncing beer and brewers, heavy, solid-looking clouds were gathering threateningly and spreading swiftly across the sky. When Boyd was no more than half a mile from Stilldown, just as Charles Beauchamp was getting into the Dodge, the storm

broke. Lightning flickered. Thunder crashed. The rain came down in rushing sheets.

The road from Nether Pemberton to Melcombe Court, though narrow, is for the most part easy for a motor-driver, pleasantly undulating and without sharp corners. But there is a place where it dips suddenly and very steeply into a gorge called Murder Bottom. Tradition credits an unknown highwayman with the crime which gave the place its name. He, if he ever existed, has been a long time dead, but travellers, especially motorists, still pass the place in peril of their lives. If you come at it from the north, as Charles Beauchamp did when driving from Nether Pemberton to Melcombe Court, you go down a very steep hill, between two high walls, round three sharp corners, along a very narrow road. A traveller from the south is hardly in better case. The corners are not quite so sharp. The road is a little wider, but the hill is steeper. From either direction you come at the bottom, if you survive so long, on a very narrow bridge, with low parapets, set at right angles to the road. It crosses in a single span the little River Ower, which gathers in a deep pond below the bridge and then surmounts a barrier of rock. After that it flows pleasantly on, just as if it had done no harm to mankind by scooping out Murder Bottom.

Charles Beauchamp, travelling from the north, reached his end of the descent to Murder Bottom. He was still cursing his fate, his wife and the weather, when suddenly his lights went out, giving him a fresh excuse for blasphemy. To all but the most skilful engineers the lighting system of a motor-car is an unfathomable mystery. The lamps either shine or they do not. If they do not there is no use trying

to make them. The proper thing to do is to place the car in the ditch, get out and walk home.

Charles Beauchamp did not do the proper thing. He was still five miles from Melcombe Court. It was raining furiously. He had reached that stage of despondency in which a man does not much care whether he lives or dies. Indeed, at the moment Charles would have welcomed a sudden death as a desirable way out of his troubles.

Peter Boyd, driving from Stilldown to Holycroft St. Mary, ought not to have passed through Murder Bottom. But the night was dark, the rain was very heavy and Boyd was in a bad temper. He did not pay proper attention to his way. He missed a turn, took a wrong road, and arrived at the top of one end of Murder Bottom just as the lights of Charles Beauchamp's Dodge went out at the other end.

The law punishes men who drive motor-cars when drunk or even partially drunk, and the law, for once, is perfectly right. A drunken driver is a public danger. But the law has not yet attempted to punish the man who drives a car when he is in a rage. Yet he, too, because he has ceased to be capable of normal self-control, is a public danger. He may be a good driver, cautious and considerate, when his temper is calm. When he suffers from the kind of nerve-storm which we call anger he is no longer responsible for what he does.

Peter Boyd was an experienced driver and he preferred safety to risk. He knew perfectly well what he ought to do when he found himself on top of the hill above Murder Bottom. To get safely down the hill and over the bridge it is necessary to

change from top gear to second or even first and trust to the engine to hold the car back.

But Boyd was in a very bad temper when he started his drive and was further exasperated by discovering that he had taken the wrong road. He uttered several blasphemous words, expressive of violent thoughts, and was over the brow of the hill in full descent before he realized that he had left the gear-changing till too late.

He made an effort to achieve safety, wrenching violently at the gear lever. He got out of high gear but the car had gathered speed and the brakes scarcely checked it. No power on earth would get the lever into place for second speed. It would not even go back into top. The car, free from all engine-control, rushed down the hill. The ineffective shrieking of the footbrake and handbrake together rose high above the noise of the rain and the splashing of the river down below. Boyd realized, though too late, that there was but a slender chance of coming alive out of Murder Bottom. He did not much care whether he did or not. Instinctively rather than deliberately he tried to guide the car. He rounded the first corner, skidding so fiercely that it seemed as if the end had come. He saw death very close, and after death—he was a simple-minded man—either heaven or hell. He was not sure whether he would be given any choice between the two, but if he was, if the decision were left to him, he determined to go to whichever of the two the chapel ministers avoided. The car rounded the second corner and then went sideways towards the bridge, skimming along the slippery surface of the road. The mind works with extraordinary swiftness at times of extreme peril. Boyd

found himself wondering whether there are elections in the next world, either in heaven or hell. Perhaps in those lands some other system has been devised for the selection of archangels and chief devils. In any case, Boyd determined not to be a candidate for either celestial or infernal honours.

Charles Beauchamp, though he felt no strong dislike of sudden death, changed gear at the top of the hill when his lamps went out. He therefore had, even on that hill, control of his car, but he could not see five yards in front of him. Taking the corners was a matter of pure guess-work. He guessed rightly at the first, and got round it ; a little less rightly at the second and tore off one of his front mudguards ; made the opposite mistake at the third, and heard his left mudguard scraping along the wall. Then he came into the full glare of the headlights of Boyd's Baby Austin and realized that there was certain to be a crash at the bridge.

There was a crash—a complete and devastating crash. The Austin Seven is a spirited and active little car, accustomed even in quiet times to jump about, sometimes several feet into the air. When Boyd's Baby felt the impact of the heavier Dodge, it leaped, and leaped high. It was crushed and battered, but its spirit was unbroken. Leaving the road with a terror-struck bound, it lighted on the low wall at the side of the bridge. There, trembling in every rod and nut, it stayed balanced for a minute, for just long enough to make it possible for Boyd to struggle out and roll from the wall to the ground. Then the little car, terribly shattered, gave a final quiver and toppled from the wall into the river below.

A minute later Boyd got up. He moved his legs

and arms cautiously, felt his ribs and collar-bone. He discovered that none of his bones was broken. He remembered catching a glimpse of a lightless car rushing towards him just before the crash, and reflected that the other man, whoever he was, must certainly be dead.

Then a peculiarly bright and protracted flash of lightning enabled him to see that the other man was still alive and was crawling cautiously out of the wreck of his car.

The Dodge, moved by the same impulse which made the Austin jump, had also tried to clear the wall into the river. But the Dodge was a much heavier car and unaccustomed to jumping. It crashed into the top of the wall, and there hung, half-way over, incapable of further movement.

Charles Beauchamp crawled to the ground and then stood upright.

‘Hullo,’ said Boyd.

And Charles Beauchamp replied :

‘Hullo.’

‘Had a smash?’ said Boyd politely.

‘Yes,’ said Charles Beauchamp. ‘Have you?’

‘Damned nasty place, Murder Bottom,’ said Boyd.

‘Beastly night for this sort of thing,’ said Charles.

Then came another flash of lightning, or perhaps two or three flashes in close succession. For perhaps two seconds it was possible to see plainly. When the thunder, which seemed to be immediately overhead, had ceased, Charles Beauchamp spoke.

‘I say, aren’t you Mr. Boyd?’ and then added to make quite sure of the question, ‘the Labour candidate?’

Boyd spoke at the same moment.

'You're Mr. Beauchamp, aren't you?'

'That's me,' said Boyd.

'Yes. Charles Beauchamp,' said Charles.

'I was the Labour candidate,' said Boyd, 'but I'm not now. I'd made up my mind, just before we crashed, to chuck up the whole bally thing. So far as I am concerned you can have the seat without a contest.'

'Curious thing that you should say that,' said Charles. 'I'd just made up my mind to stand down and give you a free run. I'm absolutely fed up with the whole rotten business.'

'You!' said Boyd. 'I don't see what you have to complain of.'

'Oh, don't you?' said Charles bitterly. 'Well, I do, and you would too if you had Colonels badgering you night and day about their income tax and farmers trying to make you swear to have all inspectors shot, and school-teachers coming to you on deputations to get them invitations to garden parties at Buckingham Palace, and women wanting their children not to go to school, and whist-drivers expecting you to squeeze their wives' hands.'

'That's nothing,' said Boyd. 'How would you like to have to promise everybody a four-hours working day, old age pensions immediately they leave school and widows' pensions paid in advance before their husbands die, chapel ministers wanting all beer poured down drains and Communists calling you a parasite because you don't shoot a capitalist every morning before breakfast.'

'Parasite!' said Charles. 'I shouldn't mind that a bit. They call me "Cheerful Charlie".'

'They call me "Big Pete", which is worse, and I'm sick of it.'

'Anyhow,' said Charles, 'it wasn't your wife who invented the name.'

'I haven't got a wife, thank God. If I had she'd probably have invented something worse.'

'She would,' said Charles Beauchamp with conviction.

After that a prolonged peal of thunder, the longest they had heard, forced them to stop talking. When it was possible to speak again, Boyd began on a new subject.

'Let's get a move on out of this,' he said; 'I'm soaked to the skin. There's nothing we can do about the cars.'

'There's something I mean to do to mine,' said Charles.

'It's a wreck,' said Boyd. 'You can't do anything.'

'I'll make a much worse wreck of it if I can. What I want to do is push the damned thing over the bridge into the river underneath. It's pretty nearly over already. A good shove ought to finish it.'

'What do you want to do that for?'

'Have you ever driven a ten-year-old second-hand Dodge which your wife bought for £30? No? Well, if you had you'd understand why I want it shoved over the bridge. If I leave it where it is some one will come along and mend it. I'd rather die—I declare to goodness I'd rather be a Member of Parliament than have to drive that thing again.'

'Oh, if that's the way you feel about it, come on,' said Boyd. 'I'll give you a hand with pleasure.'

It seemed as if the job would be an easy one. The Dodge's front wheels, clinging to their places beneath

a crushed radiator, were completely off the bridge, hanging over the space of inky darkness below which lay the pool where the waters of the Ower rested for awhile on their way to the sea. The rear wheels remained on the bridge, but apparently only because some stones, dislodged from the parapet, stopped their further progress.

Beauchamp and Boyd worked together at the stones and removed most of them. A very heavy one defeated them for a time, but Beauchamp retrieved two tyre-levers from the Dodge's tool-box and the stone was moved at last. Nothing seemed wanting but a good push. Setting their shoulders to the back of the car the two men heaved and shoved till they were breathless. The Dodge, sturdily obstinate even in her last extremity, remained unmoved.

'Must be stuck somewhere in front,' said Beauchamp. 'Hold on a minute and I'll see.'

Balancing himself on what remained of the foot-board and clinging to the side of the car, he crept forward.

Perhaps his weight disturbed the balance of the thing. Perhaps the Dodge felt she might as well accept the inevitable. Whatever the reason may have been, she began to move, toppling slowly forward.

'Back, Beauchamp, back!' shouted Boyd.

At the same time he jumped on what remained of the parapet and grabbed Beauchamp by the collar of his coat. The stones under his feet shook. Beauchamp struggled backwards. Boyd tugged at him. The car, its rear wheels lifted high, plunged headlong from the bridge into the pool below.

CHAPTER VII

FOR a moment the two men tottered on the crumbling parapet. Then they fell together, Boyd still holding tight to Beauchamp's collar. They rolled over on the bridge and lay there panting for a minute or two on the wet road. It was Beauchamp who rose first.

'I say,' he said. 'Thanks awfully. I mean to say—well—you know. Thanks awfully.'

Boyd sat up. He was a heavier man than Beauchamp and perhaps not in such good physical training. At first he was too much out of breath to speak.

'Rot!' he gasped at last. 'Nothing to thank me about.'

'Only for you I was done,' said Charles. 'I mean to say—well, you know what I mean—done.'

'Rot!' said Boyd again. 'You'd have got back all right.'

'Look here,' said Charles, 'I'm no good at saying things, especially these kind of things, but you did save my life.'

'Rot!' said Boyd for the third time. 'No more than you saved mine. We were both in the same fix when that wall began to wobble.'

But that, as he knew, and Beauchamp knew even better, was nonsense. Boyd had jumped on the

crumbling parapet. He might have stayed where he was in safety.

‘Nice of you to talk like that,’ said Charles. ‘And of course I know it’s a beastly thing to be thanked, another fellow slobbering over you and you feeling like a fool and all that. All the same, if one fellow save’s another fellow’s life—risk of his own and so forth—it’s rather up to the other fellow to say so, even if the one fellow, the first one you know, rather loathes it.’

‘What about getting out of this?’ said Boyd. ‘I don’t want to stay here all night and I don’t suppose you do. Let’s get a move on.’

‘Where to?’ said Charles.

‘Where to? Well, that rather depends, doesn’t it? I should think the thing for you is to go home. It can’t be very far.’

‘I’m not going home,’ said Charles firmly. ‘If I go home I shall have to go on with this infernal electioneering, and that’s exactly what I don’t mean to do.’

‘Don’t see why you need if you don’t want to,’ said Boyd.

But Boyd did not know Lady Edith. Charles Beauchamp of course did—very well. He understood, though he could not well say so to Boyd, that if he was to escape from the election he must also escape from his wife, at all events until the election fever had reached its crisis and begun to subside.

‘I’m not going home,’ said Charles again. ‘Can’t.’

‘Do you mean to say that you want to do a bolt?’

‘That’, said Charles, ‘is exactly what I mean.’

‘All right,’ said Boyd. ‘I’m with you.’

‘You! But why on earth should you want to do

any such thing? What I mean to say is that if I go away you'll be elected and there'll be no further trouble about it.'

'The last thing I want,' said Boyd, 'is to be elected. Politics!'

He spat raucously, audibly, with a suggestion of ferocity in the sound.

'I say,' said Charles, 'you barred my saying thanks and all that—and quite right too, though a bit awkward for me—but when you spit like that it makes me feel—— Well, you know what I mean. I don't want to be sentimental and dramatic and all that sort of film stuff; but when you spat—I didn't see you of course—too dark for seeing anything, but I couldn't help hearing. I'd have heard that expectoration of yours even if there'd been a peal of thunder on at the moment, and it made me feel—— I say, would you hate it awfully if we shook hands?'

Boyd stretched out a huge hand. Charles, after feeling about for awhile, grasped it in his.

'Just to show you,' he said, 'that if I could spit like that I would. It's exactly what I feel about politics.'

'It seems to me', said Boyd when the hand-shaking was over, 'that we'd better get out of this at once. I shouldn't wonder if the water was over this bridge in a few moments. I can't see, but to judge by the noise it's making it must be pretty high now.'

'Beastly unpleasant to be washed away,' said Charles. 'Disappearing's all right. We both want to do that. But there's nothing to be gained by overdoing it. If we were both drowned it would be overdoing it a bit, wouldn't it?'

'Come on,' said Boyd, taking Charles by the arm.

‘ There’s an old quarry just behind the bridge. We might get some shelter there.’

It was a difficult business to find the old quarry and still more difficult to discover any shelter when they got there. It was half an hour later when the two men, wet to the skin, shivering and a good deal bruised, were cowering together against the cut-away face of the rock, a little sheltered by an overhanging slab of stone.

‘ Have you ever bolted before ? ’ said Charles.

‘ Never. Have you ? ’

‘ Never.’

‘ I wonder how it’s done.’

‘ I don’t know, I’m sure.’

After that there was silence for a while. Both men were regretting their want of experience.

‘ If we’re caught we’ll be brought back,’ said Charles.
‘ At least I shall.’

He was thinking of Lady Edith and of Dodds, a forceful and vigorous man. At the back of his mind there was also a dim fear of Lord Eppington.

‘ We’re not going to be caught,’ said Boyd. ‘ We’re going to make a clear getaway.’

‘ Oh rather. I mean, of course,’ said Charles, ‘ “ Leave not a wrack behind ” and all that sort of thing. In the end when we do come back——’

‘ I’m not going to come back at all,’ said Boyd.

‘ You may not,’ said Charles, ‘ but I expect I shall, once the election is over. My idea, when we do come back, is to say that we lost our memories, suddenly, completely, that we couldn’t remember our own names or anything.’

‘ Nobody will believe it.’

‘ Oh yes they will. It’s the regular thing. Always

said in these cases, and nobody ever has any doubts about its being perfectly true. I was reading last week of a fellow who got dead sick of life and took a holiday for three months and then came back and said he'd lost his memory. Everybody killed fatted calves for him and said how jolly glad they were he'd got his memory back again.'

'It would be trying people a bit high', said Boyd, 'if we both lost our memories at the same moment and went off together.'

Charles admitted reluctantly that this was so. He could not recollect a case either in newspaper reports or fiction of a double loss of memory.

'Anyhow,' said Boyd, 'the first thing is to arrange how we're to get off without being caught and brought back. It will be quite time enough to invent stories about our memories afterwards.'

Charles squeezed streams of water out of the bottoms of his trouser legs, while he meditated silently on the problem.

'Bit rough on Lady Edith, isn't it?' said Boyd. 'I'm not married, so of course I don't really know. But I should have thought——'

'Oh, my wife won't mind,' said Charles. 'I'll come back again as soon as the election has blown over. That will be in another fortnight, won't it? She won't have time to marry again, so there'll be no complications.'

'If we could only pretend to be dead,' said Boyd. 'But how can we? We can't leave a note to say we've both committed suicide.'

'There was a fellow in a book I once read', said Charles, 'who diddled an insurance company by saying he was dead and burying himself, so to speak, in

a coffin full of stones. Jolly good idea, I thought. Nobody thought of looking for him, especially after he had a tombstone put up. He lived for years on the insurance money in Eastbourne, or somewhere like that, pretending that he was a retired parson.'

'I don't see how we're going to get the coffins.'

'No,' said Charles, 'and anyhow, I don't want to have to pretend I am a retired parson. Beastly nuisance having to go to church every day, and you'd be expected to when everybody knew that you'd nothing else to do and had been a parson once. I should hate it.'

'There was another fellow in another book I read', said Charles after a thoughtful pause, 'who left his clothes in a neat pile on the shore and everybody thought he had gone in to bathe and got drowned. That strikes me as a neat scheme. What about it?'

'I suppose he had some other clothes to go away in,' said Boyd.

'I forget. But now you mention it I should think he must have.'

'Well, we haven't. And if we turn up somewhere to-morrow morning stark naked everybody will be sure to ask why.'

'I suppose so,' said Charles a little regretfully.

He felt at the moment that he would be a great deal more comfortable without his soaked garments than he was with them.

'If we were once in London', said Boyd, 'we could dodge off somewhere without being noticed. But it'll be a devil of a job getting to London without leaving tracks of any sort.'

'Matter of money to begin with, I suppose,' said

Charles. 'And I've only got seven-and-sixpence.' He was feeling in his pockets as he spoke. 'Two half-crowns—if they aren't pennies. My fingers are so numb that I can't feel and it's too dark to see. But I think they're half-crowns, and a florin and a sixpence.'

'I've got the return half of a ticket from Bristol to London,' said Boyd, 'fourpence and a ten-pound note.'

'That'll be plenty. I can get as much more as we want when we get to London.'

'But the ten-pound note isn't mine,' said Boyd.

'Couldn't you borrow it for the time? Whose is it?'

'Yours,' said Boyd. 'At least I suppose it was yours once. Lady Edith gave it to me to pay for a dog.'

'What sort of a dog? I didn't know you sold dogs.'

'I don't. She gave it to me because she ran over a dog. But I needn't go into the whole story. The question is, can we use the money?'

Though an Irishman by birth, Boyd had been a long time in England and had acquired that respect for honesty which characterizes the English people. Beauchamp was less scrupulous.

'We can,' he said. 'If it's in your pocket, what's to stop us?'

'The man who owned the dog', said Boyd, still seeking justification, 'wouldn't take the money.'

'That seems to me to settle it,' said Charles. 'If my wife gave it it certainly isn't hers now. If the man won't take it it isn't his. The dog is dead, I suppose. I seem to be the only person with any claim on the money.'

'The man's wife will be round at my office to ask for it to-morrow, and there'll be a row if it isn't there.'

'That won't matter to us. We shall be gone. I sincerely hope that nobody will be able to find us. Anyhow, if you feel any doubts about the honesty of taking it it's quite easy to send a ten-pound note to the Chancellor of the Exchequer afterwards as conscience money, some time next year perhaps. He won't want to make inquiries. We can say "From a dead dog" or "From a lover of our dumb friends". Something like that.'

'Even if we use the ten-pound note', said Boyd, 'I don't see how we're to get off without leaving tracks. We can't hire a car, for the fellow we hire it from would give information at once.'

'There's no use going back to Melcombe Court to get my Alvis,' said Charles. 'That man of mine, Hodgkins, would notice it was gone first thing to-morrow morning. He'd start asking questions or putting the police on the job or something and I'd be suspected at once.'

It is, indeed, a surprisingly difficult thing for two men to escape from a district in which they are very well known, without leaving traces which can afterwards be followed up. But there was one point in favour of Beauchamp and Boyd. Sooner or later the two cars would be found at the bottom of the pool below the bridge. The presumption would be that there had been a collision and that both men were drowned. There would be no search, except in the river for the bodies, and no pursuit. But if they were seen and recognized—in their case seeing meant certain recognition anywhere in the neighbourhood—

then nobody would, or indeed could, believe that they were drowned.

The problem narrowed itself down. Some plan must be made by which they could reach a railway station whence a train could be taken to London. It must be a station outside the boundaries of the constituency, a long way outside, if they were to avoid certain recognition.

'There's a train from Bristol at seven in the morning,' said Boyd.

'Bristol is a good thirty-five miles from where we are this minute,' said Charles, 'and it must be midnight now, or later. We can't walk it.'

'There are early trains, milk trains, at a lot of small stations,' said Boyd. 'But if we go to one of them we're bound to be spotted.'

'If we only had bicycles!'

They had no bicycles. But Boyd brightened up a little at the suggestion. He knew a man in Holycroft St. Mary who kept his own bicycle and his wife's in a shed outside his house. They could easily be taken. But there was the same difficulty which prevented the use of the Alvis car. The bicycles would be missed in the morning and the police would be asked to find them. The result of that would be disastrous, for the police in such affairs are very efficient. They would certainly put two and two together—two stolen bicycles and two vanished men—and make a four which would lead to the conclusion that Charles Beauchamp and Peter Boyd were not dead.

Then Charles produced a plan which at first sounded hopeful. He knew a farmer who kept horses in a badly fenced field. From time to time these horses escaped and pranced along the roads for miles, to be

found next morning in some quite remote place. Charles's idea was to take two horses, ride them to the neighbourhood of a distant railway station, whence he and Boyd might take a train to London without being recognized. The horses could be left on the roadside and the farmer, knowing the creatures' vagrant habits, would never ask how they got there.

It was a good plan and might have been adopted if Boyd had not confessed that he could not ride a strange horse without saddle, bridle, bit or reins, with any certainty of getting to the place he wanted to reach.

'Sorry,' he said, 'but I don't believe I could do it.'

'Now you suggest it,' said Charles, 'I don't believe I could either.'

Boyd made the next plan. It was possible, but it would not be pleasant, to walk to Holycroft St. Mary. There he felt confident that he could reach the pit-head without being observed, by approaching it through fields. Near the pit was a railway siding in which wagons waited for their loads of coal. It would be easy to climb into a loaded wagon and hide in it until an engine came and dragged it away to some destination, London perhaps, or Bristol.

It was an extremely unattractive prospect and Charles shrank from it.

'Beastly business', he said, 'covering oneself up with wet coal. How long do you think we should have to wait before the wagons started?'

Boyd, who did not like the prospect any better than Charles did, confessed that loaded wagons often lay for days, sometimes for weeks; he had known a wagon which lay for a whole year, loaded but unmoved.

'That', said Charles, 'puts the lid on that plan. I'd rather try walking.'

‘ We’ll never get anywhere by walking,’ said Boyd.
‘ It’ll be daylight before we’ve covered fifteen miles
and then people will be about and see us.’

‘ Unless you’ve got something better to suggest
we’ll have to try it. Come on.’

CHAPTER VIII

‘**T**HERE’S just one thing I must do before we start,’ said Charles. ‘My pipe.’
He thrust his hands into one pocket after another.

‘You won’t be able to light it,’ said Boyd. ‘Everything’s too damned wet.’

‘Light it! I sincerely hope I’ll never light it again.’

He found the pipe, grabbed it by the bowl and hurled it into the river.

‘What on earth did you do that for?’ said Boyd.

‘I did it because I’m sick of being a little imitation of Stanley Baldwin, and because I don’t care a hang whether any silly fool ever votes for me or not. I loathed that pipe worse than anything else about the election—except perhaps the Dodge car.’

‘I see,’ said Boyd, who knew all about Charles’s pipe and had often seen pictures of it in Charles’s mouth. ‘I only wish I could heave Comrade Hurst into the river too.’

The storm had passed away. The thunder was no more than a distant rumble. The rain had almost ceased as the two men climbed out of Murder Bottom and set out along the road which leads to Melcombe Court. They chose that way because in the other direction lay Holycroft St. Mary and a series of mining

villages. The country round Melcombe was less thickly populated. There would be fewer people about and smaller risk of recognition.

They passed the gate of Melcombe Court. Charles thought for a moment of raiding the house in order to get something to eat and drink. He was very hungry and he felt that a stiff glass of whisky and soda—half whisky and half soda—would strengthen and encourage him. He knew that there were plates of sandwiches, a decanter and a siphon standing ready on the library table. He could have entered the house without difficulty. The temptation was strong. It was strong for Boyd too. It is a proof of the determination and self-control of the two men that the temptation was resisted. There must be no tracks left, no clues. Sandwiches mysteriously eaten and whisky unaccountably consumed would set people asking questions.

They set their teeth and tramped on.

The grey of the coming dawn spread over the sky. It was no longer very dark. Trees and houses were visible. Signposts and road notices became legible. One notice, intended to intimidate motorists, informed them that they were approaching a farm crossing. They reached the crossing and saw arranged on a bank beside the gate four large metal milk-churns. Boyd looked at them. They were labelled: The Eupeptic Cream Cheese Company, Lanesbury.

Charles Beauchamp explained.

‘A lorry comes along every morning between four and five’, he said, ‘and picks up the milk-churns at all the farms about here. They’re left standing ready at the sides of the road.’

‘I wonder’, said Boyd, ‘whether we could manage

to get a lift on that lorry. It would get us on a bit faster than we're going.'

The objections to the plan were obvious enough, almost the same objections which prevented the use of the Alvis car, Boyd's friends' bicycles and the taking of a train at a local station. The man who drove the lorry and his mate would sooner or later report the fact that they had given a lift to two men. They would describe them. They might even know one or both of them by sight. It was Charles Beauchamp who suggested a way out of the difficulty.

They could hide in the ditch while the churns were being loaded up, and then, when the men returned to the driving-seat, they could rush out and climb on to the back of the lorry.

'There's a little shelter for the driver in the front of these lorries,' he said, 'a kind of cabin. While the men are getting into it they won't be able to see anything behind them. That will be our chance to climb up among the churns.'

'They'll see us next time they stop. Bound to, when they get down.'

'No they won't,' said Charles. 'The moment we feel the lorry stopping we'll hop down and get underneath while they're loading up. Then when they're climbing into their seat we get back.'

Charles was very eager to try this plan. He had walked six or seven miles and was beginning to feel that any form of conveyance, even a lorry laden with milk-churns, would be pleasant, and any risk worth taking to avoid walking any farther. Boyd, though he saw the difficulties and dangers of the plan, was also beginning to feel that he had walked enough.

They sat down together inside the gate of the farm

crossing, out of sight of any one passing along the road.

They had not long to wait. The drivers of milk-collecting lorries are early at their work. No doubt the makers of cheese, the Eupeptic Cream and others, like to have the milk waiting for them when they get to their factory in the morning.

The sound of the approaching lorry, a loud and very disagreeable noise, like that made by a huge machine gone mad, came clear on the morning air. It grew louder. The two men in the ditch raised their heads cautiously and peered along the road.

'Damn!' said Boyd. 'We're done now. The driver is Sam Pratt, one of my election committee. He knows me as well as he knows his own brother. He'll recognize me at once.'

'He won't see you,' said Charles. 'How can he recognize you if he doesn't see you?'

'And his mate', said Boyd bitterly, 'is young Bert Jones, the son of the woman who keeps house for me. He's bound to know me.'

'Keep quiet,' said Charles. 'If you do as I tell you they'll not know there's anybody here.'

The lorry stopped opposite the milk-churns. Sam Pratt climbed down from one side and Bert Jones from the other. Charles noted with satisfaction that they left their engine running and that the engine of that lorry was a particularly noisy one. If they could avoid being seen he and Boyd would certainly not be heard, however loud their footsteps and scramblings might be.

Sam Pratt seized one milk-churn and Bert Jones another. They rolled them on their edges to the tail of the lorry. They lifted them up, a laborious job,

for churns full of milk are heavy, and set them on the floor of the lorry. The other two churns were treated in the same way. There were already ten churns in the lorry, for the round was nearing its completion. A chain was loosed and passed round the four new churns to keep them in place. That was Bert Jones's job, and while he was doing it Sam Pratt lighted a cigarette. Then the two men went to the front of the lorry and climbed into their places.

'Now,' said Charles.

He and Boyd, the sound of their steps drowned by the engine, ran across the tail of the lorry. They scrambled up just as Sam Pratt slipped in his clutch and released the brake. The lorry gathered way and went rattling and banging along the road.

'Good,' said Charles. 'We managed that well.'

After all they had been through it was a relief to rest awhile even on the floor of a jolting lorry with their backs against rattling milk-churns. But their time of ease, if it could be called ease, was short. The lorry slowed down. The next farm, with its roadside deposit of milk-churns, had been reached.

'Quick!' said Charles.

They crawled on their hands and knees to the back of the lorry. They lay across it on their stomachs with their legs dangling over the road. The moment the lorry stopped they dropped to the ground and scrambled underneath.

This time there were only two churns, and the halt was shorter. Sam Pratt and Bert Jones did exactly as they had done before without speaking a word. Once more Bert made fast the chain and Sam lit another cigarette. Once more Charles, who was beginning to enjoy the game, timed things rightly and they got

back to their resting-place. There were three more halts, at short distances apart. Ten more churns were loaded up. There was now very little room left for passengers. The getting out, crawling under, and climbing up again, were beginning to be tiring. The fun had gone out of the hide-and-seek part of the game after the second time. The sense of muscular strain increased.

‘I can’t stand much more of this,’ said Boyd, who was a heavy man.

He was strong both in arms and legs, but he had never done much gymnasium work. The stretching, swinging and climbing affected him more than they did Charles Beauchamp.

‘It’s all right,’ said Charles. ‘I know this country. The next is the last stop. After that the lorry turns back to get to Lanesbury, where the cheese factory is.’

‘Goes back?’ said Boyd.

He did not like the idea of going back again, wasting the miles they had gained by climbing in and out of the lorry. But Charles Beauchamp did not intend to do that. There had come into his mind the germ of a plan, daring, perhaps dangerous, but if it succeeded, splendid.

They were passing out of the rich dairy land where farms were many and each house stood among its trees. The country was growing barer, the land poorer, the trees fewer and stunted. They were approaching the long stretch of bare downs where the road runs straight as a stretched cord over steeply undulating land, up hill, down hill, up hill, down hill, always quite straight for miles. The last halt of the lorry—Charles Beauchamp knew the place—was at the top of the first of a long series of bare hills.

He grabbed Boyd's arm.

'Can you drive a lorry?' he shouted.

There was no danger in shouting. Neither Sam nor Bert could have heard the sound of a gun had it been fired among their milk-churns.

'Drove one for two years after I left the pit,' Boyd shouted back. 'Road gravel from the quarries.'

'That's all right then. You'd better do the driving.'

'Driving what?'

'This lorry, of course.'

'But——'

Boyd had a dozen objections to make.

'What about Sam Pratt and young Bert? Can't knock them on the head, can we?'

'They'll see us, won't they, as we climb into the driver's seat. Bound to. And Sam Pratt would recognize me if he saw no more than my ear.'

'They'll know some one has taken their lorry. They must know that, if it's driven away before their eyes. The police will guess it's us.'

'What the hell would we do with the lorry afterwards? We can't go driving about for the next ten days in a lorry full of milk-churns.'

Charles had the same answer for each objection.

'Just you trust me. Do what I tell you and it'll be all right. There isn't time to explain everything now.'

He was right about that. There was no time for explanations. The lorry slowed down again.

'Now', said Charles, 'be ready to drop when he stops. Get underneath and crawl as far forward as you can. We are right on top of the hill.'

They dropped. They stooped. They crawled. At last they wriggled. The lorry had a good ground

clearance. They were right under the driver's cabin when they stopped.

Sam Pratt tugged at his brake-lever, jamming on the brake as tightly as he could. He had pulled up just over the brow of the hill, and he had no wish to see his lorry careering uncontrolled towards a smash in the ditch at the bottom. He and Bert climbed out. There were four churns waiting for them at the left-hand side of the lorry.

Charles and Boyd crept out at the other side, the right-hand side. Sam and Bert rolled down two churns and hoisted them into the lorry.

Charles climbed into the cabin and took Bert's place. Boyd followed him and took the driver's seat.

Sam and Bert went back to the ditch for the two remaining churns.

'Take off the brake,' said Charles, 'but don't get into gear. Let her run of herself.'

It was wise advice. Had the engine been put into gear Sam at least, probably Bert too, would have known that there was some one in control. But if the lorry ran free—well, any car might start down a hill without encouragement or help from the driver if the brakes had been carelessly applied.

Bert, rolling his second churn, looked up.

'Damned if the old girl isn't moving,' he said.

The old girl—if a laden lorry can be described in this way—was undoubtedly moving. Charles and Boyd crouched in their corners, to keep away from the round window in the back of the cabin, through which they might possibly have been seen. They felt with intense satisfaction that the lorry was gathering speed.

'After her,' said Sam.

He was a man who kept his head in emergency. He saw that prompt action and swift running were the only way of preventing disaster. They ran. But very soon they stopped. The lorry was going faster and faster, far faster than they could possibly run.

'You must have forgot to put on the brake, Sam,' said young Bert.

'Do you think I'm a bloody fool?' said Sam. 'I put on the brake right enough.'

'Then you put it on too hard or something,' said Bert, 'and smashed the connecting rod.'

He was not personally responsible for the lorry and was rather enjoying the novel kind of excitement. Sam was in a different temper.

'There'll be a hell of a smash at the bottom of the hill,' he said.

And so, according to all the laws which govern the running of cars, there should have been. It is not one car out of a hundred that will run fifty yards unguided without swerving to one side or the other; and after a swerve a smash is inevitable when there is no hand on the steering-wheel.

'Glory be!' said Bert excitedly. 'She's at the bottom and starting up the next hill.'

The lorry had passed the danger spot at her highest speed and was climbing the straight road in front of her, her pace decreasing as she went.

'She'll stop half-way up and then run back,' said Sam despondingly, 'and then there'll be the hell of a smash.'

The lorry's pace diminished, for Boyd, bent on disguising the fact that there was any one in control, was managing things very skilfully. As the car slowed down he slipped into his lowest gear and crawled on.

'She'll do it, she'll do it!' shouted young Bert. 'She'll get to the top.'

'If she does', said Sam, 'there'll be the hell of a smash, the almighty hell of a bloody smash at the bottom of the next hill.'

'Come on,' said young Bert, 'and let's see what happens.'

They ran down, and then, pantingly, up. They reached the top of the hill which the lorry had just managed to surmount, in time to see that there was no smash in the valley beyond. The lorry, now looking very small in the distance, was approaching the top of the second hill. Sam stared at her.

'It's a bloody miracle,' he said. 'That's what it is, a bloody miracle. But miracle or no miracle,' he added angrily, 'there'll be the hell of a Day of Judgment smash when she meets something on the road.'

'Maybe we'd better go after her,' said young Bert.

They went after her, though they did not catch sight of her again for a long time. They went on and on for miles. Sam muttered that it was 'no bloody use' going after her, since all they could do when they came to the scene of the disaster would be to bury the corpses of the people in the other car.

'What will you say to the boss when you get back?'

'Say? I'll say the truth. I'll say that his old brakes smashed and that there ought to be a law against risking the lives of poor men by sending them out in lorries with rotten brakes. And we'll see that there is a law about it when we get Peter Boyd into Parliament.'

Sam Pratt was not only a member, he was an enthusiastic member of Boyd's election committee, a man

with a full belief in the power of Parliament to cure all human ills if only the Labour party were in power.

The lorry, now driven in top gear at her highest speed, rattled merrily along.

‘Managed that pretty well, I think,’ said Charles.

‘But what’ll we do with the thing now?’ said Boyd.

They passed a signpost marked Bassford, 5 miles.

‘Ever been at Bassford?’ said Charles.

‘Never.’

‘Nor have I,’ said Charles. ‘Most unlikely that any one at the station will recognize us and there’s sure to be a morning train to somewhere.’

‘But what about the lorry?’

‘Drive on a bit,’ said Charles.

They drove until they were within a mile of Bassford. Luck favoured them. They did not meet a single vehicle on the way.

‘I’d drive right up the station if I dared,’ said Charles, ‘but it’s better not to take risks. We must keep up the idea that the lorry ran away of itself.’

At the side of the road, half a mile out of Bassford, there is a nice shallow ditch. Into this Boyd ran the lorry, quietly, without upsetting it. The wheels embedded themselves in mud. The lorry tilted over. The milk-churns slid to the lower side with great banging. Boyd climbed out at one side, Charles at the other.

They walked on towards the station.

‘I could do with a drink,’ said Charles.

‘Too early,’ said Boyd. ‘Damned silly things the licensing laws.’

Four hours later Sam Pratt and Bert Jones, very tired and footsore, found their lorry, just where Boyd had left it in the ditch.

‘ Well I’m damned ! ’ said Bert, who though young knew how to swear. ‘ Who’d have thought of the old girl running all that way by herself without a smash ? ’

Sam Pratt grunted. The power of speech had left him for the time.

‘ If I hadn’t seen it ’, said Bert, ‘ I wouldn’t hardly have believed it.’

Sam Pratt grunted again.

‘ Better have those brakes seen to ’, said Bert, ‘ before we start home. I wouldn’t like that to happen again, not with us in her.’

Then at last Sam Pratt spoke.

‘ I’ll turn Catholic,’ he said. ‘ That’s what I’ll do. I’ll be a bloody Guy Fawkes.’

‘ I always thought you were a Primitive Methodist,’ said Bert.

‘ I was,’ said Sam, ‘ but I’m a Catholic now. The Catholics goes in for miracles, so I’ve heard. I didn’t believe in miracles before, not in miracles with milk lorries in them. But I do now. If any one was to come and tell me he’d seen the ruddy old sun going the wrong way across the sky I wouldn’t call him a liar, not after what I’ve seen to-day.’

CHAPTER IX

‘**M**R. BEAUCHAMP is not at home.’

The speaker was Martin, the butler at Melcombe Court. He was answering an inquiry made by Mr. Dodds, the election agent. The time was half-past eleven on the morning after the thunderstorm and the Conservative whist-drive at Nether Pemberton.

‘Out about the place somewhere, perhaps?’ said Dodds.

‘As to that, sir, I can’t say I’m sure.’

Martin could, if he chose, have said that it was exceedingly unlikely that Mr. Beauchamp was anywhere ‘out about the place’. He could have said, if he chose, that Mr. Beauchamp had not slept the night before at the Court, that he had not breakfasted there that morning, that, indeed, nothing had been seen of him by any one in the house since he set out for Nether Pemberton the night before. The sandwiches left for him in the library were found there, in the morning, untouched. The whisky in the decanter had not been diminished by even the smallest glassful. In fact, Mr. Beauchamp had certainly not returned from Nether Pemberton to the Court.

All this Martin could, if he liked, have told. He did not do so because he regarded Mr. Dodds very

much as Hodgkins regarded the Dodge car. The election agent and the car might be useful in their way. Hodgkins never denied that the Dodge would go. Martin would have admitted, if asked, that Dodds did his work efficiently, but that, in Martin's opinion, was not the only thing to be considered.

'He isn't no class,' he used to say, talking things over with the first footman. 'In the hall I shouldn't have no objection to him. I shouldn't be against his having tea in the housekeeper's room.' This was stretching things a long way. The housekeeper's room is, socially, much superior to the servants' hall. 'But I don't hold with fellows like that associating with Mr. Beauchamp and her ladyship. No good ever comes of taking people out of their places.'

'I think I'll have a stroll round and see if I can find him,' said Dodds.

Martin had no objection to his doing that. He felt perfectly certain that the search would be vain, but it was no business of his to say so, and a little disappointment would no doubt be good for the uppish and self-confident Mr. Dodds.

Charles Beauchamp's failure to return home the night before had of course been discussed in the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room. The first footman, an imaginative man, with a natural taste for disaster, suggested there might have been an accident. He was sharply snubbed by Martin.

'Had there been an accident,' he said, 'Mr. Beauchamp would have telephoned to say so.'

'Not if he'd been hurted. He might have been hurted too bad to telephone.'

'Had Mr. Beauchamp been injured,' said Martin,

'the doctors attending him would have communicated with the Court at once and, her ladyship being absent from home, I should have received the message.'

That settled the first footman. It was clearly impossible to suppose that there would have been no doctors in attendance if Mr. Beauchamp of Melcombe Court were hurt, even slightly. Had there been an accident, resulting in an injury, there would have been at least three doctors in attendance and, in all probability, a specialist from London. That was what happened when men like Mr. Beauchamp met with accidents. The upper housemaid suggested that owing to the violence of the thunderstorm Mr. Beauchamp might have decided to spend the night at Nether Pemberton. She had been born and brought up in Nether Pemberton and had a high opinion of the village. Martin, who also knew Nether Pemberton, disagreed with her about the place and showed the foolishness of her explanation of Mr. Beauchamp's absence.

'There isn't no house there', he said, 'in which Mr. Beauchamp could spend the night.'

'There's the vicarage,' said the upper housemaid, speaking up boldly for the honour of her native place.

'You may take it from me', said Martin severely, 'that Mr. Beauchamp is not likely to spend the night in the vicarage. He wouldn't find what he's accustomed to in a house of that character.'

'The storm was terrible,' said the upper housemaid. 'I'm sure I couldn't sleep a wink with the way the thunder was going on.'

She meant to suggest that any house, even a vicarage, might be desirable when a storm was really

bad. But Martin thought the point scarcely worth noticing. He had a theory of his own to produce.

'It's my opinion', he said, 'that Mr. Beauchamp drove over to Tatterton Chase, to see her ladyship, who is spending a few days there with her father, the earl. His lordship's man would be able to supply Mr. Beauchamp with what he required for the night.'

This explanation of Charles Beauchamp's failure to return to the Court was natural and simple. It was generally accepted by the household staff, though unwillingly by the first footman and several of the under housemaids, who would have preferred an accident as far more exciting. The upper housemaid and the second footman, who was 'walking out' with her, were slightly irritated by Martin's contempt for Nether Pemberton. But it was plainly possible, even likely, that Charles Beauchamp had preferred to spend the night at Tatterton Chase in company with Lady Edith rather than return to solitude at the Court. Besides, the theory, since it came from Martin, had all the authority of an official statement.

Mr. Dodds, totally unenlightened and far from expecting anything unusual, wandered into the garden hoping to find Charles Beauchamp there. He did not find him, but he found the head gardener.

The head gardener had heard of Mr. Beauchamp's absence, but he was, by temperament and training, a cautious man. It was a fixed rule with him never to gossip or report gossip about his master or his affairs. He told Dodds that he had not seen Mr. Beauchamp that morning, without even adding that he did not expect to see him.

Dodds strolled on. He came at length to the

yard where he found Hodgkins making some adjustments in the engine of the Alvis. He was a little more communicative than any one else had been.

'I haven't seen Mr. Beauchamp this morning,' he said, 'nor it's not likely I would, for he didn't come home last night.'

'Didn't come home? But he had an appointment with me at eleven-thirty this morning.'

'I don't know nothing about that; but if Mr. Beauchamp came home last night, he walked. That there Dodge isn't here this morning, so if Mr. Beauchamp came home he must have left his car behind him—not that you can rightly call that Dodge a car.'

'Are you sure?'

'I am sure that the Dodge wasn't in the garage this morning,' said Hodgkins, 'which it would have been if Mr. Beauchamp put it there last night.'

'Could he have broken down anywhere on the road?'

'If there'd been a breakdown', said Hodgkins, 'I'd have been sent for to fetch the car home. That's Mr. Beauchamp's invariable custom when there's trouble on the road. You may take it from me, Mr. Dodds, that there weren't no breakdown, and anyway,' he added, though a little unwillingly, 'that Dodge wouldn't break down, not if you was to hammer it with a sledge-hammer it wouldn't break down. You couldn't do anything to that Dodge that would stop it going.'

He was, of course, thinking of the engine. The lighting system is another matter. Hodgkins was not thinking of it.

'It was a pretty bad night,' said Dodds; 'I never saw worse rain.'

‘Rain wouldn’t stop that Dodge. No rain would. It’s my belief that that engine would run just the same if you were to put it at the bottom of the sea, that is to say once you got it started.’

‘There might have been an accident,’ said Dodds. ‘I hope to goodness there hasn’t been. But even the Dodge might get smashed up, I suppose, if a lorry ran into it.’

It was Hodgkins’ opinion that in a collision of the kind the lorry would be the sufferer. The Dodge would go on uninjured. But he felt that Dodds, who did not know the Dodge really well, could hardly be expected to believe this.

‘Had there been an accident,’ he said, ‘I should have been sent for just the same as if there’d been a breakdown. That is Mr. Beauchamp’s invariable custom.’

Any one listening to him might suppose that Charles Beauchamp met with an accident once a fortnight and had a breakdown in each intervening week, a most unjust supposition. The only accident with any of the Court cars during the previous six months was Hodgkins’ slaughter of the Nye dog the day before in Holycroft St. Mary.

‘But where is Mr. Beauchamp?’ said Dodds. ‘I must get hold of him somehow.’

‘Mr. Martin’s of opinion that he drove over to Tatterton Chase after leaving Nether Pemberton and spent the night there. Her ladyship’s there at present. I drove her over myself yesterday.’

This seemed to Dodds, as it had seemed to every one in the house, very likely.

‘That’s it,’ he said. ‘That’s what he’s done.’

‘I beg your pardon for contradicting you, Mr.

Dodds, but that's not what Mr. Beauchamp has done. Whatever he's done it's not that. Mr. Martin may say what he likes, but I know.'

'What do you mean? What do you know?'

'I know that Mr. Beauchamp wouldn't drive a mile more than what he couldn't possibly help in that Dodge. If he'd been going to Tatterton Chase he'd have come home and taken the Daimler or the Alvis. You wouldn't catch him driving the Dodge at all if it wasn't that it's been represented to him that the Dodge is likely to attract the popular vote, which it may do, the people about these parts not having enough education to appreciate a car.'

This reasoning, absolutely conclusive to Hodgkins, left Dodds unimpressed. It seemed to him that Martin's theory was certainly right. He went back to the house, walked into the library, sat down at the telephone and rang up Tatterton Chase.

The answer to his inquiry came with unmistakable clearness. No, Mr. Beauchamp is not at the Chase. Lady Edith was there. She had arrived the day before. Mr. Beauchamp was not with her when she came and had not arrived later.

'I should like to speak to Lady Edith,' said Dodds.

That, it appeared, would not be a very easy matter to arrange. Lady Edith was with the earl, who was in bed, suffering from sciatica. His lordship did not like being disturbed. His lordship particularly disliked being disturbed when the disturbance originated with the telephone. His lordship disliked the telephone, but of course if the matter were of urgent importance——

The matter was of the most urgent possible importance in the opinion of Mr. Dodds. He had been

passing through Holycroft St. Mary rather late the evening before. The men in the afternoon shift were just coming out of the pits and the streets were crowded. Mr. Dodds had been obliged to stop his car. While standing still two men, miners, had come to him. They had made a most remarkable request. They would like Mr. Beauchamp, the Conservative candidate, to address the men next day at the pit-mouth at six o'clock when the afternoon shift was coming up and the night shift ready to go down.

Such a thing had never happened before in all Mr. Dodds' long experience of electioneering. The miners were Socialists to a man and there never had been the slightest hope of detaching one of their votes from the Labour candidate. It had never been considered worth while to speak to them or to hold any kind of meeting in their villages in support of a Conservative candidate. Dodds was excited and delighted, but—— It was obviously necessary to find Charles Beauchamp, and the time was very short.

The telephone buzzed and Lady Edith's voice came to him.

'Good morning, Mr. Dodds. No. Charles is not here. He's at home.'

'He isn't,' said Mr. Dodds.

'Oh, nonsense. He must be. Very likely he has——'

There she stopped. She thought it very likely that Charles had told Martin to say he was not at home. Charles was quite capable of doing a thing like that if he had reason to expect a visit from Dodds, and she was not there to stop him. But she could not very well say all that to Dodds.

'Where are you?' she asked.

'I'm at Melcombe Court. I'm speaking from there.'

'Insist on seeing Charles,' said Lady Edith. 'Tell Martin that I say you're to see him.'

'But he isn't here. I assure you——'

'Of course he's there, and if you give my message to Martin he'll find Charles for you. Tell Martin definitely that I say Mr. Beauchamp is to see you at once.'

'But he isn't here,' said Dodds. 'He didn't sleep here last night. He didn't come back after the meeting at Nether Pemberton. The car isn't here. I've just been talking to the chauffeur.'

'Then where is he?'

'I don't know, but it's really very important for me to get into touch with him. The miners of Holy-croft St. Mary——'

He told Lady Edith about the remarkable request the miners had made. There was no need to emphasize the importance of it. Lady Edith realized that at once.

'Charles must be found at once. Could he have stopped the night at Nether Pemberton? There was a storm, wasn't there?'

'The worst thunderstorm for years,' said Dodds.

'Then that's what he's done. He's put up for the night at the vicarage. There's nowhere else in the village he could stop except the vicarage, and he always had a fancy for the vicar's wife. Such a pretty little woman and so sweet to Charles. Do you remember them at the garden party? You were at the garden party, weren't you? Then you must remember how Charles led her about and got her tea and took her off to see the golden pheasants.'

I told him to be really nice to her after the whist drive. So important being nice to people, isn't it? And of course such a treat for her, poor dear. I often think those poor darling clergywomen have such dull lives. Nobody except their husbands and perhaps the organists, and very often the organist is quite impossible. Do ring him up and tell him to come home soon. I'd do it myself, but if I did the vicar's wife might think I was jealous—so bad for her, poor sweet, wouldn't it? Besides, the vicar might preach at her. Most unpleasant, though of course quite right. Such a lot of unpleasant things are right, aren't they? So obstinate of them.'

'I can't ring up,' said Dodds. 'Nobody in Nether Pemberton has a 'phone. I found that out when I was arranging about the whist drive.'

'So tiresome of them,' said Lady Edith. 'I can't think why people are like that, can you? I'm afraid the only thing is for you to drive over and fetch Charles back. Such a bore for you and so naughty of Charles, when she ought to be cooking the vicar's dinner, or darning his socks or something. Tell Hodgkins to take you over in the Alvis, and don't let Charles make excuses. If he says he has a cold or anything, just tell him I say he mustn't. You'll start at once, won't you? I'll get a car here to take me home and I'll be at the Court in about half an hour. You ought to have Charles back by that time. Then we'll fix everything up about the Holycroft St. Mary meeting. Splendid, isn't it? Just fancy those miners wanting Charles! But I always knew that they aren't as bad as people make out. Nobody ever is. I always say that, and this just shows that I'm right.'

CHAPTER X

MR. DODDS made the journey to Nether Pemberton in great splendour and comfort ; but he made it in the company of a chauffeur in a very bad temper. Hodgkins hated getting out the Daimler for any one except Lady Edith. He particularly hated getting it out for a mere election agent like Dodds. But the Alvis was not available. Hodgkins was in the middle of the job of adjusting the tappits when Lady Edith's order reached him. In spite of the dislike of the car he would have taken the Dodge, had the Dodge been available. Thus it happened that there was nothing for it but to take the Daimler, and not even the thought that he was going to fetch Mr. Beauchamp reconciled Hodgkins to that.

He was even more sulky on the way home, for the journey was made in vain. Beauchamp was not at Nether Pemberton Vicarage and had not spent the night there. Mrs. Priestly, the vicar's pretty wife, was not there either. She had left home the day before in order to look after a sick aunt who lived at Eastbourne. That was what the vicar said. Dodds was slightly suspicious. Sick aunts in Eastbourne are convenient and sometimes fictitious. The vicar's wife was undeniably pretty and she was certainly not at home. Charles Beauchamp had mysteriously disappeared.

He made his report to Lady Edith in the library.

'Mr. Beauchamp did not spend the night at Nether Pemberton,' he said. 'He went off in his car directly the whist drive was over. Mrs. Priestly——'

'Mrs. Priestly? Oh, the vicar's wife, I suppose. What did she say?'

'She wasn't there,' said Dodds. 'She went away yesterday to visit a sick aunt in Eastbourne.'

'Don't be silly, Mr. Dodds,' said Lady Edith. 'Charles didn't run away with her.'

'I didn't mean to suggest——'

'My dear Mr. Dodds! You tell me that Charles has vanished and that the poor dear vicar's wife has gone to visit a sick aunt in Eastbourne. If you don't mean that Charles has taken her off for a week in Paris, what do you mean? But Charles wouldn't do a thing like that, he wouldn't really. I know he's naughty at times, especially over this election. Too tiresome for words, but that's quite a different thing.'

'Of course,' said Dodds. 'I quite understand that. But at the same time I can't help fearing that a hint of anything of the sort, even a breath of suspicion, would be absolutely fatal in a constituency like this.'

It was, after all, Lady Edith who said that the vicar's wife was pretty and that Charles had been attentive to her at the garden party. If there were to be unpleasant stories about the disappearance, Lady Edith would have herself to thank for the scandal. All Dodds wanted was to give her a hint to be cautious in what she said.

Having given his hint, Dodds dropped the subject of the vicar's wife and got back to the puzzling fact that Charles Beauchamp could not be found.

'It's awkward,' he said, 'very awkward, not being able to find him.'

'Oh, Charles will turn up all right. He always does.'

'This meeting to-night,' said Dodds. 'We ought to have him for that. In fact we must have him. It's a magnificent opportunity. Nothing like it has ever occurred before in my experience. The miners of Holycroft St. Mary——'

'Isn't that the place where I ran over a dog yesterday?' said Lady Edith.

'Ran over a dog? That's unfortunate. If you'll excuse my saying so, Lady Edith, dreadfully unfortunate. In fact a disaster. If it had been anywhere else it wouldn't have mattered so much—I mean to say if it had been a Conservative dog, in Pell Magna or Nether Pemberton, we might have smoothed it over.'

'I did smooth it over,' said Lady Edith.

Dodds did not believe that. It seemed to him impossible that she could have smoothed over such a thing. The destruction of a dog belonging to a miner, and therefore presumably Socialist in politics, might easily—would indeed inevitably—be regarded as an act of wanton violence, the sort of thing working men had to expect from the idle rich if a Conservative Government were returned to power.

'If it had been a cat', said Dodds, 'or a hen—I really think we should have got out of it better if it had been a child. It might have been one of a large family and hardly missed. But a dog——'

'They cheered me when I was going away,' said Lady Edith, 'so I think it's all right.'

'Cheered you?' said Dodds, still incredulous.

'Yes. I gave ten pounds to Peter Boyd himself, and I kissed the little boy who owned the dog, and I

promised him a cocker spaniel, and Hodgkins was frightfully nice and said he was sorry and promised to send along a fox terrier with a black spot over one eye, and I said I'd give another ten pounds if wanted. And every one was deliciously sweet and said I'd behaved like a perfect lady. The only one who didn't simply love me was the child's father, and he was just as nasty to Peter Boyd as he was to me, so he doesn't matter, though he did put poor Hodgkins into a temper by calling him a powdered lackey or something like that. But Hodgkins didn't let any one see that he minded. He was perfectly splendid, and Peter Boyd shook hands with him, and the only way I knew that he was cross was that he ran the speedometer up to seventy-five as soon as we got outside the village. That's what Hodgkins always does when he is angry. I often try to annoy him a bit before starting for a drive just to see how fast he can make that Daimler go.'

Dodds had recognized since the very beginning of the campaign, that Lady Edith had a real flair for politics ; but never before had she shown actual genius. He saw suddenly the solution of the puzzle which had been worrying him for ten hours or so. Why had the miners of Holycroft St. Mary invited the Conservative candidate to address them outside their own pit, in the very middle of a general election when political passions were at their fiercest ? He understood now. Lady Edith, in a most difficult position, had ' behaved like a perfect lady '.

' Lady Edith,' he said, ' in case Mr. Beauchamp doesn't turn up—I'm not suggesting that there's been an accident or anything like that——'

' Oh, Charles is all right. Charles always is. Nothing ever happens to him.'

‘ In case he’s tired when he gets home,’ said Dodds, ‘ would you address this meeting at Holycroft St. Mary to-night ? ’

‘ Of course I will,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ I’d love to, and I expect I’ll do it a great deal better than poor dear Charles would.’

‘ I’m perfectly certain of that,’ said Dodds.

He spoke the simple truth. Charles Beauchamp’s indeterminate spiritless speeches had long been a trouble to him. He had always respected Lady Edith’s powers and now was more sure of them than ever.

‘ Let’s make plans,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ Supposing I have the little boy who owned the dog on the platform beside me. Rather effective, wouldn’t it be ? An appeal to the mother heart ? ’

‘ I’m afraid there won’t be a platform,’ said Dodds. ‘ It’s a pit-head meeting, rather an improvised affair.’

‘ Never mind,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ I’ll have him beside me on the pit-head or wherever I stand, and I’ll have him dressed up in a blue tunic and knickers, with a lace collar round his neck. Peterson—Peterson’s my maid you know. Peterson shall go into Bristol and buy the sort of suit I mean—pale blue, I think, with stockings to match. No, socks ; and very short knickers so as to show off his dear little legs. Hodgkins shall drive her in and I’ll send a note to the boy’s mother asking her to wash his knees. All the men will cheer when they see him.’

The idea was a novel one to Dodds, but he saw that it might have great political value. There is an appeal about a child, when properly washed, which reaches the heart of every Englishman.

‘ I’ll wear an evening dress’, Lady Edith went on,

‘ with strings and strings of Woolworth beads round my neck, to show how democratic I am, and they’ll all cheer more. I’ll tell the poor sweets that if Charles is elected every little boy will have a blue tunic with a lace collar, and all their wives will have necklaces of Woolworth beads miles long. Then, when they’re all cheering, Charles shall come forward—— Oh, I forgot, Charles won’t be there. So naughty of him. You’ll come forward, leading a black cocker spaniel by a pink ribbon. I’d better make a list or Peterson will forget half the things.’ She took a little notebook from her bag and scribbled hurriedly : ‘ Blue tunic suit, lace collar, twenty necklaces of Woolworth beads, one cocker spaniel (black), five yards of pink satin ribbon. Now is there anything else ? I’ll have on my ermine wrap of course. They’d simply love that. Everybody loves ermine wraps. Charles gave it to me last year when I thought I was going to have a baby. It turned out that I wasn’t, but I thought it would hurt his feelings if I gave it back, so I kept it. Do you think I’d better tell the miners that, or would they be shocked ? Of course if they weren’t shocked it would make them think a lot of Charles, which is what we’re trying to do, isn’t it ? I might just say that a good husband is sure to be a good Member of Parliament, and that they can see by the ermine wrap what a good husband Charles is. But perhaps I’d better not mention the baby. What do you think, Mr. Dodds ? ’

Dodds hesitated to give an opinion about the baby. There is nothing more useful in electioneering than a touch of intimacy, and from that point of view the baby which was hoped for might be expected to win a vote or two. But the working classes are inclined to reticence on the very subjects on which the idle rich

delight to speak frankly. Intimate confidences about a baby which was merely hoped for might, as Lady Edith suggested, shock the miners at the pit-head.

In the end he got out of the difficulty by shirking the real point.

‘The audience will be almost entirely men,’ he said.

‘They may not care to hear much about babies.’

‘Very well,’ said Lady Edith, ‘if you feel that way I won’t tell them how I got the ermine wrap, though I do think it’s rather important not to let the poor dears think that they can have ermine wraps without earning them. I mean, I’d have liked them to know that I earned mine. So democratic, isn’t it, to earn whatever you have? And I can’t help feeling that we all ought to be as democratic as we can, especially just now when there’s a frightfully important general election going on.’

Though Dodds was of opinion that Lady Edith would make a much more effective speech than her husband at Holycroft St. Mary, he could not escape from the feeling that some effort ought to be made to find out what had become of Charles Beauchamp. He said so to Lady Edith, rather breaking in on the plans she was making for the meeting.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘if you’d rather have Charles to speak than me——’

‘Oh, I wouldn’t,’ said Dodds, quite sincerely, ‘but it is rather awkward not knowing where he is.’

‘Poor dear Charles’, said Lady Edith, ‘is so bored by this election. I wouldn’t say it to any one except you, Mr. Dodds, but he’s perfectly sick of the whole thing. I expect he’s just toddled off somewhere for a couple of days’ holiday. Very likely he’s gone up to London to his club. Charles loves his club. So sweet

of him, isn't it, considering what a funny lot of old sticks the other members are.'

'Could you telephone', said Dodds, 'or telegraph to find out? What is his club?'

'Charles hates being fussed,' said Lady Edith. 'He's a perfect darling in every way, but if any one fusses him he gets quite snappy.'

Dodds ought perhaps to have been satisfied with this explanation of Charles Beauchamp's disappearance. It was likely enough that he was bored by the election. His club, no doubt one of those in which no member ever speaks to another, was a natural place of refuge. But Dodds was aware of certain difficulties. Charles Beauchamp could not have gone to London by train after the whist drive at Nether Pemberton because there is no midnight train from any station in the neighbourhood. If half Hodgkins said about the Dodge was true, it was exceedingly unlikely that Charles had driven the whole way to London, a matter of 100 miles or so, in that car. If Charles had wanted to go to London, he would have come home first, had some clothes packed and taken the Daimler car.

Lady Edith seemed perfectly confident that there had not been an accident, but Dodds was not convinced by her reasoning. It was all very well to say that nothing ever happened to Charles Beauchamp. There are lots of people who are killed or maimed in accidents who never before had so much as a sprained ankle. Charles Beauchamp might be a man of that sort.

'I'll run off now', said Lady Edith, 'and tell Peterson what she has to buy. Do you think a new dress for the mother would be a good thing? But perhaps that would be bribery. One does have to be so frightfully

careful how one bribes, doesn't one? I mean to say, if I promise that the Government will give her a new dress that will be all right, but if I give it to her myself, it wouldn't be, though in reality it would be better for the poor, brave, dear thing, because I'd really give it and the Government wouldn't. Or if it did it would make her fill up so many forms that it would be hardly worth while, unless it was a very, very good dress.'

Dodds, when Lady Edith left him, was haunted by the thought of an accident. Charles might have run into something, or have been run into. He might have been carried unconscious into a hospital. He might be lying in a ward, with icebags on his head, suffering from concussion of the brain, unable to explain who he was or where he lived.

Dodds sat down at the telephone and rang up every hospital in the neighbourhood. There were three, small establishments, known as cottage hospitals. One matron reported the admission of a young man with a hand crushed by a falling stone. The other two had had no accident cases at all during the previous day or night. Dodds tried the larger hospitals, in Bristol and Bath. There was no news in any of them of Charles Beauchamp. The only unconscious victim of an accident the night before was a woman who had been run down by a lorry. Dodds tried the police, but got no help from them. No wrecked car had been found on the roads anywhere in the neighbourhood. There was no report of any motoring accident the night before. He had just finished with the last possible police-station when Martin came in carrying a card in his hand.

'There's a young man has called,' he said, 'asking to see Mr. Beauchamp.'

‘ He can’t see Mr. Beauchamp. Tell him he’s not at home.’

‘ Quite so, sir,’ said Martin. ‘ That’s what I did tell him. He then asked to see Lady Edith. Not wishing to disturb her ladyship, who is with her maid making out a shopping list, I thought that perhaps you might see him, if convenient.’

‘ Who is he ? ’

Martin handed him the card.

‘ Mr. Rudolph Sims ’ was printed in imitation black-letter type in the middle of the card. Across the bottom, in ordinary lettering, ran the words ‘ Representative of the “ Wessex Argus ” ’.

‘ I’d better see him, I suppose,’ said Dodds. ‘ Show him in here, please.’

During a general election the representatives of the newspapers are exceedingly busy men. The candidates and their agents are their natural prey. Dodds had given hundreds of doses of doctored news, what he very properly called dope, to Mr. Rudolph Sims, to his colleagues on the *Wessex Argus* and to his rivals on other papers. He was prepared to go on distributing tablespoonsful of similar dope whenever asked for it. He was so well accustomed to ladling the stuff out that he received newspaper men without the slightest thrill of excitement or nervousness. But this time he awaited Mr. Sims with some misgiving. Was it possible that the news of Charles Beauchamp’s disappearance had already reached the press ? If so, what was he to say about it ? Lady Edith’s theory of a day or two’s holiday in London, the holiday of a man bored to exasperation, was obviously unfit for public consumption, even if it were true. Indeed, especially if it were true. But what else was there to say ?

Mr. Sims' first words reassured him.

'I'm sorry to have missed Mr. Beauchamp,' he said, 'but it doesn't really matter. I'm sure you'll be able to tell me all I want to know. It's about Mr. Boyd that I want to speak to him.'

That was a relief. About Mr. Boyd Dodds was prepared to talk for hours if necessary. He smiled.

Mr. Sims' next words startled him and drove the smile from his lips.

'You've heard, no doubt, that Mr. Boyd has disappeared?'

'Disappeared!' said Dodds. 'What do you mean?'

'Vanished,' said Sims, explaining himself. 'Can't be found anywhere. Faded away suddenly, so to speak. Here yesterday and gone to-day, nobody knows where.'

'Boyd!' said Dodds. 'Boyd disappeared! But what for? Why? What's the sense of it?'

Sims sank his voice to a whisper.

'Of course I don't know, don't absolutely know, but what the people in Holycroft are saying is that he's bolted with the funds.'

'Good God! But——' Dodds was cautious even in accepting good news. 'What funds?'

'They're saying all sorts of things in Holycroft,' said Sims, 'and most of what they say is obviously rot. I should say myself that he's bolted with the funds of the Co-operative Society. Those are the only funds in the place worth taking. Anyhow, whatever he's bolted with, it's all jam for you, gives your man a simple walk-over.'

'Yes,' said Dodds, but he spoke doubtfully and without elation.

The disappearance of the Labour candidate might

give his man a walk-over if his man were there to walk.
But——

He was driven back to the original question, now become more important and more baffling than ever—
Where was Charles Beauchamp ?

CHAPTER XI

COMRADE HURST was in the committee room at Holycroft St. Mary every day. On the morning after the storm he was in his place particularly early. He expected and found the usual pile of correspondence. He wanted to read it all, and if possible to answer a few of the more pressing letters before 10 o'clock. At 10 o'clock, he and his chief, Peter Boyd, were to leave the office to keep an important engagement at Oatlands.

Oatlands is a mining village very like Holycroft St. Mary. It is a stronghold of the Socialist cause and therefore a place to be cherished by Peter Boyd. In addition to the usual organizations Oatlands possesses a Ladies' Labour League, managed by an enthusiastic and vigorous committee.

By way of furthering the Socialist cause, the committee of the Oatlands Ladies' Labour League organized and advertised an entertainment of the most comprehensive kind. A whist drive, a concert, and what is known as a 'Social' were to be combined in one glorious festival. Unfortunately the combination proved in actual practice to be extremely difficult. The artists who were to sing at the concert regarded themselves as much more important than the whist-drivers or those who merely wanted to dance. The whist-drivers held strongly that they were the main-

stay of the whole entertainment and that both singers and dancers should give way to their convenience. The dancers declared vociferously that a 'Social' was not, properly speaking, a 'Social' at all if those who paid their money to attend it were to be bored with songs and tripped up by whist-players' tables.

The committee, like Julius Caesar's Gaul, was divided into three parts, and there seemed a likelihood of a complete breakdown, followed by bitter recriminations. Nothing could possibly be worse for the cause than a quarrel among the members of the Ladies' Labour League. No one, however angry, would be so wicked as to vote for the Conservative candidate, but it was unfortunately likely that a victory for the singers might so enrage the whist-drivers and the Social dancers that they would refrain from voting for any one. The triumph of either the whist-drivers or the dancers would have a similar effect.

Comrade Hurst felt that he was not capable of dealing with this difficult situation. Fortunately he was quite confident that Boyd could settle the matter without annoying any one. Peter Boyd possessed a faculty for talking sense to angry people, which is common enough among his countrymen, but rare, and therefore very effective, in England. Comrade Hurst never understood how Peter managed these things; but experience had taught him that the fiercest combatants yielded to the charm of the Irishman's tongue. It was impossible to go on fighting when Peter Boyd sprayed the arena with jokes, and if a fighter found in the end that he had not got his own way—a thing which it often took him days to discover—he always had the satisfaction of knowing that nobody else had got his.

With this confidence in his leader Comrade Hurst had scarcely any anxiety about the deadlock at Oatlands. He had arranged that Peter Boyd should meet the committee in person, and once that meeting took place all would be well.

Working hard at his letters Comrade Hurst scarcely noticed the passing of time and was startled when a casual glance at his watch showed him that it was a quarter-past ten. Boyd had not arrived. Comrade Hurst swore. Unpunctuality was one of Boyd's worst faults. Hurst had suffered from it in the past and expected to suffer from it in the future, but he felt that the importance of the Oatlands business was great. It would take half an hour to drive there. The committee was to assemble in the Miners' Welfare Institute at 10.30. The tempers of the members would not be improved if they were kept waiting. Having nothing else to do they would spend their time in arguing with each other and the original quarrel might very well become so bitter that even Boyd's tongue would fail to soothe it.

Comrade Hurst became nervous. He lit and threw away several cigarettes. He gnawed the end of a wooden penholder into pulp. He kicked the leg of the writing-table so hard that he hurt his own toe, already tender owing to an ingrowing nail. At half-past ten he determined to go to Boyd's house and if necessary pull him out of bed. He fully expected to find him in bed and very likely asleep. But no candidate ought to sleep while his most enthusiastic lady supporters are calling each other nasty names in a miners' institute 15 miles away.

Comrade Hurst took his hat from the peg behind him and put it on his head. Then, just before he

started, there was a tap at the door and Mrs. Nye came in.

‘What do you want?’ he said irritably.

‘I want’, said Mrs. Nye, ‘to know what’s been done about the money.’

She was a tall thin woman with clear eyes and a singularly firm mouth, not the kind of woman who wastes time in mere politeness. Knowing her own mind, she went straight to her point, whatever it was.

‘What money?’ said Comrade Hurst.

‘You know well enough what money. The money the lady in the motor-car left for me when she ran over our Alf’s little dog.’

Comrade Hurst remembered all about the matter. Lady Edith had left ten pounds to compensate the Nye family for the loss of the dog. She had handed the ten-pound note to Boyd.

‘Oh, you’re going to take it, are you?’ he said. ‘Your husband refused it yesterday, you know. Too proud.’

‘I’m going to take it if I can get it,’ said Mrs. Nye.

‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘If you can get it.’ ‘Of course you can get it as soon as you choose to ask for it.’

‘I’m glad to hear that,’ said Mrs. Nye icily, ‘but I’d be gladder to see the money.’

‘Mr. Boyd has it,’ said Comrade Hurst. ‘He’ll give it to you as soon as he comes in. I’m expecting him every minute.’

‘Oh, you’re expecting him, are you? And if it isn’t asking you too much I’d be glad if you’d tell me where he is now.’

Comrade Hurst could not very well say ‘Sound asleep in bed’. Such a confession would certainly

lead to misunderstanding. People might begin to say that Boyd was leading a life of lazy luxury, just as if he were a capitalist. It seemed to him that the best thing to do was to give Mrs. Nye her money and then get rid of her.

He unlocked a drawer in the writing-table, took out a cash-box and unlocked it. He looked into it a little anxiously. He was not sure that it contained as much as ten pounds. Fortunately it did. He took out ten single notes and handed them across the table to Mrs. Nye.

'Count them', he said, 'and then give me a receipt.'

Mrs. Nye counted them deliberately.

'There's ten,' she said. 'Ten pounds. Where's the other ninety?'

'The other ninety! What other ninety?'

'Ten from a hundred leaves ninety,' said Mrs. Nye, 'or it used to when I was at school, but maybe you've changed that nowadays.'

'Do you mean to say', said Comrade Hurst, 'that you think the lady left a hundred pounds to pay you for a dirty little cur of a dog that wasn't worth half a crown. If that's the idea you've got in your head you may just get it out again as quick as you can.'

'There isn't one in the whole of Holycroft', said Mrs. Nye, 'but knows it was a hundred pounds the lady gave. Only there's some that says it was two hundred pounds. You're forgetting, Mr. Hurst, that there was men standing there and friends of my own among them when the lady put the money into Mr. Boyd's hand.'

'If they say that she gave a hundred pounds they're damned liars,' said Comrade Hurst.

‘ You may curse as much as you like, but I mean to have my money. I’ve a sick husband and our Alf is crying his eyes out after the little dog, and I’m a poor woman, and I want my rights, and what’s more, there’s plenty here will see that I get them. Why else do you think they asked Mr. Beauchamp to come here and make a speech to-night ? ’

This was the first hint Hurst had of the invitation to a pit-head meeting which had been given to Mr. Dodds the evening before.

‘ Get out of this ’, he said, ‘ and don’t talk nonsense.’

He spoke boldly, but there was cold fear at his heart. Not even Mrs. Nye would have invented, could have invented, an invitation from the miners of Holycroft to Charles Beauchamp.

‘ I’ll get out of this if you like,’ said Mrs. Nye, ‘ but there’ll be questions asked about that money at the meeting to-night, and the next thing will be that the police will be after your big Peter Boyd.’

‘ Mr. Boyd ’, said Hurst, ‘ will answer any questions about that money or any other money at the meeting or anywhere else.’

‘ Oh, will he ? ’ said Mrs. Nye. ‘ If he’s as ready as all that to answer questions, why isn’t he here to answer me now ? ’

‘ He’ll be here in a minute or two.’

‘ No, he won’t be here, and well you know it. He’s far enough away by this time, though not so far that the police won’t be able to catch him.’

‘ I’ll go up to his house and bring him down to talk to you,’ said Comrade Hurst, exasperated.

‘ Go up to his house then,’ said Mrs. Nye, ‘ but you’ll not find him there. I’ve been at his house myself this morning. It’s the first place I went to before I came

here. I asked to see him. I asked Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, who lives there along with her boy Bert, who helps to drive the milk lorry. I asked her if I could see Mr. Boyd and she told me he wasn't there. That's the answer she gave me. And he hadn't been there all night. He went out in his motor-car yesterday evening and he didn't come back. What do you think of that, Mr. Hurst?'

What Mrs. Nye thought of it was plain enough. Boyd had received a hundred pounds, possibly two hundred pounds, from Lady Edith. Of that she was firmly convinced, as we all are by agreeable statements made by our neighbours and repeated many times. Boyd had disappeared, in his motor-car, a most convenient aid in sudden flight. He had taken her hundred pounds or two hundred pounds with him.

The English are of all people in the world the most scrupulously honest. Men who would do many other wrong things, perhaps worse things, will not steal or even cheat in money matters. Yet—this is an odd piece of psychology—the English are of all men the most suspicious. Mrs. Nye would not have stolen a sixpence herself, not even to save her little Alf from hunger. But she went through life expecting to be defrauded of her just rights. And now the thing she always expected had actually happened. Chance, and the almost incredible foolishness of a great lady, had flung a fortune to her, and before she had savoured in imagination the delight of such richness the whole sum had been stolen from her.

Compared to Mrs. Nye's clear grasp of the situation Comrade Hurst's thoughts were mere confusion. He knew that the idea of a hundred pounds was fantastic,

but he also knew that not even a written statement signed by Lady Edith herself would shake Mrs. Nye's conviction. If Lady Edith were to swear publicly, before a commissioner of oaths, that she had given ten pounds and no more, Mrs. Nye would believe that she had been got at by evil men desirous of defrauding the poor of their rights. He knew, quite as certainly, that Peter Boyd had not stolen the money and run away with his loot. That was not the sort of thing Boyd did, or ever could do. But Boyd had disappeared. He had not turned up at the committee room that morning, though he knew the importance of pacifying the ladies at Oatlands. He had not been at his house the night before. Where was he?

'I must see about this at once,' he said.

The ladies at Oatlands might by this time be scratching each other's cheeks. The men of Holycroft St. Mary had been guilty of base treachery, and the meeting at the pit-head that night was a menace to the cause of Labour. But even these things were of small importance compared to the disappearance of Boyd.

He pushed Mrs. Nye from the room and followed her, locking the door behind him.

The idea of a motor accident the night before occurred to him at once.

'I must get into touch with the police,' he said.

'I'll be glad if you do,' said Mrs. Nye, 'and have him arrested before all the money's spent.'

This continued assumption of Boyd's guilt was too much for Comrade Hurst. He was already harassed, puzzled and anxious. Mrs. Nye's words brought his temper to the breaking-point.

'Curse you, blast you, damn you!' said Comrade Hurst.

This was no proper way for an election agent to speak to a lady, herself a voter, even if her husband happened to be a Communist and therefore unreliable. But there were excuses to be made for Comrade Hurst. Things were going very wrong indeed.

CHAPTER XII

COMRADE HURST hurried along the street towards the police-station. Mrs. Nye followed a few steps behind, doing her best to keep up, protesting rather breathlessly that she was prepared to give evidence on oath, either in the police-station or anywhere else, any quantity of evidence, supported by any kind of oath. All she wanted was that Boyd should be caught before he had got rid of the whole of her hundred pounds. Some of the money he would certainly have spent, but if speedily arrested there might be a good deal left.

Mr. Sims of the *Wessex Argus* was smoking a cigarette at the door of a tobacconist's shop, hoping that something might happen which could be profitably turned into news for his paper. He intended, a little later on, to follow Boyd and Hurst to Oatlands. It seemed to him likely that words worth repeating might be spoken by one or two of the members of the committee of the Ladies' Labour League. He noticed with interest that Comrade Hurst seemed to be in a hurry. He noticed, with greater interest, that Comrade Hurst looked very much excited. He noticed that Mrs. Nye was talking a great deal and talking very loud. Things seemed promising. He stepped from the doorway and greeted Comrade Hurst.

'Good morning,' he said. 'Any special news? Anything you'd like reported in the press?'

'Nothing whatever,' said Comrade Hurst abruptly.

He hurried on, but Mr. Sims kept pace with him.

'I needn't remind you', said Mr. Sims, 'that the *Wessex Argus* does its best to give a fair show to both sides. Anything you say will appear precisely as you say it. We may be nominally a Conservative paper, but we circulate a good deal in the mining districts and it wouldn't suit us to be anything but impartial, in reporting news, I mean. Articles are different, of course.

He slipped a notebook from his pocket and licked a pencil to show his readiness to report Comrade Hurst's remarks *verbatim*. They were going at about five miles an hour, and Mr. Sims, whose legs were short, had to trot a little, more than once. But he was quite ready to make shorthand notes even if he had been running hard. A good reporter should be prepared to make shorthand notes while dancing, playing cards, or even swimming, if necessary.

'I've nothing whatever to say,' said Comrade Hurst.

As a good election agent he knew that it was wise to be civil to newspaper reporters. He was well aware of the folly of snubbing Mr. Sims, but he was at the moment incapable of being civil to any one. There are times in all our lives when the wisdom in which we have carefully wrapped ourselves is whirled away from us by the blast of sudden disaster and we are left nakedly incapable of anything but instinctive action.

Comrade Hurst, without a friendly word or a hint of valuable information to come, went into the police-station.

Mr. Sims hesitated and then turned back. Mrs. Nye, who had been left behind, came towards him, still talking volubly.

She was quite ready to go on talking and rather pleased than frightened when Mr. Sims licked his pencil and scribbled hard in his notebook.

Her story was well worth writing down. Mr. Sims, a man of some experience who had met angry women before, did not believe half she said. It seemed to him ridiculous to suppose that Lady Edith had given a hundred pounds for the dog. No woman, however rich, however anxious to secure the goodwill of the voters of the district, would give such a sum as compensation for the life of a dog. It was, he supposed, possible that she had given five pounds. Like most people in the district, he knew Boyd and liked him. Many things are possible, even to the best of us, and it was conceivable that Peter Boyd might run away with a great deal of money—two thousand pounds or some such amount. But it was ridiculous to suppose that he had bolted, risking imprisonment and sacrificing his chance of election, for the sake of five pounds, or even, if Mrs. Nye's incredible story were true, for the sake of a hundred pounds.

But though most of what Mrs. Nye said was plainly false, there remained something in her story which was worth investigating. It really seemed as if Boyd had disappeared. He was certainly not to be found. Mr. Sims, scenting the chance of sensational news, set out to discover what had happened to Peter Boyd.

Half an hour's work filled his note-book with shorthand jottings, and satisfied him that Boyd really had vanished, leaving behind him a trail of rumours and suspicions. Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, an elderly

and respectable widow, was perfectly clear in her story. Mr. Boyd had gone out the night before in his car to attend a meeting. Before he started he said that he would be home at eleven o'clock or earlier. A bottle of whisky, some biscuits and a siphon of soda-water were left ready for him. But he had neither drunk the whisky nor eaten the biscuits. He had not slept in his bed. He was not to be found in the morning. In fact he had not returned home and Mrs. Jones did not know where he was.

Nobody else in Holycroft St. Mary had quite such a clear story, but everybody to whom Mr. Sims spoke had a story and was perfectly ready to tell it. Indeed, every one liked to tell his story at full length, beginning with the running over of the Nyes' dog the day before. It was generally agreed that Lady Edith had behaved in the most laudable way, offering, and actually paying, a generous sum in compensation. People differed about the exact amount, some putting it as high as two hundred pounds, with a prize racing greyhound thrown in. Others said more modestly that she had given fifty pounds, with the offer of a Pekinese of long pedigree for the child. Every one agreed that the money, and perhaps the greyhound and the Pekinese, had been handed over to Peter Boyd in the street. Several people said that they had seen Lady Edith counting the notes into Boyd's hand. There was entire agreement about the fact that Boyd had not been seen in Holycroft St. Mary since he set out in his motor-car the evening before.

Mr. Sims felt satisfied that this at least was true.

Comrade Hurst, having got rid of Mr. Sims and Mrs. Nye, told Sergeant Mole of the County Police about his anxiety. Sergeant Mole was a large placid man

whose very appearance was soothing to those in trouble. He had been dealing for years with the hysterical mothers of lost children, with the fiercely anxious fathers of abducted girls, with the passionate husbands of eloping wives, with the tearful wives of husbands who had deserted them. His long experience convinced him of the fact that almost every one, strayed child, girl victim, seduced wife, or errant husband, turned up again safely very soon, with a perfectly simple explanation of their absence. He had never before had to deal with the case of a vanished Parliamentary candidate, but, since all men, women and children are very much alike, he supposed that the mystery of Mr. Boyd's disappearance would solve itself in a few hours if left alone.

'I wouldn't be surprised', said Sergeant Mole, 'if he'd stayed in Stilldown after the meeting.'

'He wouldn't do that,' said Comrade Hurst. 'He said he'd be home before eleven, and he had an appointment this morning.'

'It was a nasty night,' said Sergeant Mole, 'a very nasty night.'

'Even if he'd stayed the night', said Hurst, 'he'd be back in Holycroft long before this.'

'Well,' said the sergeant, 'it's easy to find out whether he stayed the night in Stilldown or not. We've a constable there. I'll ring him up and ask.'

The constable at Stilldown was quite sure that Mr. Boyd had not spent the night there. Being a conscientious constable, he had stationed himself, in spite of the weather, outside the door of the village institute in which Mr. Boyd's meeting had been held. The sergeant muttered approval as he listened to the report. It is the duty of a constable to be outside the door

of any room in which a political meeting is held. It may be, as at Stilldown, that the principal speakers at the meeting are united chapel ministers, but even then it may well happen that the help of the police is required before the meeting is over. Standing in the door of the hall, the constable had seen Mr. Boyd come out, had watched him creep into his hooded car and seen him drive off, cheered by a few young men who did not approve of the temperance policy of the united chapel ministers.

‘ If he didn’t stay in Stilldown ’, said Sergeant Mole, ‘ he stayed somewhere else on the way home. It was a nasty night. Nobody would care for driving about.’

‘ There’s nowhere else between this and Stilldown ’, said Hurst, ‘ where he could stay.’

The sergeant, after reflection, admitted that this was true. The road from Stilldown to Holycroft St. Mary is a very lonely one.

‘ If there’d been an accident ’, he said reassuringly, ‘ I’d have heard of it by this time. But I’ll make inquiries if you like. I’ll ring up the Inspector at Winstock.’

Inspector Lathom is the officer in charge of the police-station at Winstock. It was he who answered Sergeant Mole. No report of any motor accident the night before had reached the police. No wrecked or disabled cars had been found in the district by constables on patrol and there was no report from anywhere else of deserted cars.

Having given this reassuring information Inspector Lathom made a few inquiries of a general kind.

‘ Much damage done in your neighbourhood, Sergeant ? ’ he said in a quiet conversational tone.

‘ A few trees down,’ said the sergeant. ‘ They’re

being cleared off the road. And part of the parapet of the bridge at Murder Bottom is washed away.'

'I know the place. I always thought that bridge wouldn't be safe if the river rose. Only the parapet gone, you say? Well, it might be worse. I expect the river was pretty high.'

'It had gone down a bit this morning,' said the sergeant, 'but the man I sent out to look at it says that the water must have been over the bridge last night.'

After that Sergeant Mole made his report to Comrade Hurst.

'Not a single accident', he said, 'and not a sign of a wrecked car anywhere. You may make your mind easy, Mr. Hurst. Boyd will turn up all right, some time in the course of the day.'

'But where is he? I must get at him at once. Where is he?'

'We shan't know that till he tells us,' said the sergeant. 'It's always the same in these cases. The person who is supposed to have been lost turns out to have been in some quite obvious and likely place, just the first place any one would look for him, only nobody ever thinks about it till afterwards.'

The sergeant was a soothing man and his words ought to have brought comfort; but Comrade Hurst was too anxious and too much excited for any comfort.

'But, damn it all, Sergeant, what are you going to do? You must do something. We can't have a man disappearing like this, especially the Labour candidate for the Division.'

'What do you want me to do?'

'Find him,' said Comrade Hurst. 'Find him, dead or alive.'

'Come now, come,' said the sergeant. 'Nobody's dead or the least likely to be dead.'

'I'd almost rather he was dead. Things are in a frightful muddle and I can't get them straightened out until I find Boyd. There are a dozen women tearing each other's eyes out this very minute at Oatlands, and I can't stop them until I find Boyd. That blasted swine Beauchamp is going to hold a Conservative meeting at the pit-head here this evening and the men will listen to him if they get it into their heads that Boyd has run away.'

'Is that what they're saying?' said the sergeant, chuckling.

He had long ago found out that the things people say are far more amusing than anything which actually happens. He found entertainment much better than that provided by cinemas or theatres simply by listening to the things 'they say' in Holycroft St. Mary.

'They say worse than that,' said Hurst. 'They say he's bolted with some money.'

'Let them say it,' said the sergeant. 'Peter Boyd wouldn't bolt with money. Everybody in his senses knows that.'

'That bitch of a Nye woman is saying it though. You never heard anything like the way she's talking. She says that that woman, Beauchamp's wife, who ran over the dog yesterday, left a hundred pounds with Boyd for her, and that he's run away with it.'

'Does she say that? Well, all men are fools. You don't have to live long to find that out. But women are bigger fools. You'd think they couldn't be. You'd think it was impossible; but they are.'

Boethius, who wrote a book to show how we ought

to find consolation from philosophy, would have liked Sergeant Mole if he had known him. A true philosopher that sergeant. But Hurst was not like Boethius.

‘I’ll wait another hour,’ he said, ‘and if Boyd hasn’t turned up then I’ll telephone to the Inspector myself.’

‘Wait till dinner-time,’ said the sergeant. ‘Every man turns up to his dinner.’

CHAPTER XIII

THE Daimler, running as faultlessly as ever, slipped over the railway bridge into the main street of Holycroft St. Mary. This time Hodgkins drove with almost excessive caution, though the street was empty. It was three o'clock. The children were all at school. It was not an hour at which a new shift takes up work at the pit.

Hodgkins stopped opposite the post office and put his head out of the window beside him. He looked forwards and backwards. There was no one in sight. Hodgkins made up his mind that he would have to get out of the car and go into the post office to ask his way. He was saved that exertion. Just as he opened the door a young man, well dressed and intelligent-looking, came out of the post office. This was Mr. Sims, the correspondent of the *Wessex Argus*.

He had been using the telephone in the post office to inform his editor that so far no trace had been found of the missing Labour candidate. Being an alert young man, he recognized the Daimler as the property of Mr. Charles Beauchamp and welcomed the chance of a talk with the chauffeur. News of a valuable kind, what Mr. Sims spent his days in seeking, can often be obtained from a chauffeur or a butler when nothing is forthcoming from those more highly placed.

Hodgkins, who had Miss Peterson, Lady Edith's maid, beside him, welcomed the chance of talking to any one who could tell him where the Nyes lived. The finding of a particular cottage in a place like Holycroft St. Mary is often difficult and may involve turnings which are troublesome in a large car.

'Oh, yes,' said Sims. 'I know the Nyes' house. Let me see. You pass the first turn on your right. Then you come to a lane. But perhaps I'd better show you the way. It's rather difficult to find.'

'It's giving you a lot of trouble,' said Hodgkins politely.

'No trouble at all,' said Sims with equal politeness. 'If I may get into the car I'll direct you as you go along.'

'There's two dogs in the back of the car,' said Miss Peterson politely. 'I hope they won't bite you.'

Sims peered through the window. He saw a very small terrier, a puppy, Hodgkins' own contribution to the Nye household, and a black spaniel with long ears, bought by Miss Peterson in Bristol. He felt reassured. Spaniels never bite anybody and the puppy was too young to do much harm even if it did bite. Sims got in.

'Mr. Beauchamp's car, I think,' he said, leaning forward and speaking into the space between Hodgkins and Miss Peterson. In this way he made sure of being heard by both.

The car moved slowly forward.

'Pass the first turn on the right,' said Sims.

'Curious thing,' he went on, 'this disappearance of Mr. Boyd.'

'Do I turn up here?' said Hodgkins.

They were passing a narrow lane, very uninviting for the driver of a big car.

'Straight on for a bit,' said Sims. 'I expect Mr. Beauchamp was greatly surprised when he heard the news.'

'Can't say, I'm sure,' said Hodgkins.

Miss Peterson was a little more communicative.

'Mr. Beauchamp isn't at home at present,' she said.

'Is this the turn?' said Hodgkins.

'No,' said Sims. 'I say, I'm so sorry. I'm afraid we've passed it. You'll have to go back.'

'Look here,' said Hodgkins, 'do you know the way or don't you?'

'I know it perfectly well,' said Sims, 'but I was so much interested in what you were telling me about Mr. Beauchamp that I let you slip past the turn.'

This was not the exact truth. Sims was so much interested in what he hoped he was going to be told about Mr. Beauchamp that he had deliberately allowed Hodgkins to pass the turn so as to have more time for talking. His plan succeeded. While Hodgkins was turning the car, a slow business with a large car in a narrow street, Sims learned some interesting and useful things from Miss Peterson.

Mr. Beauchamp, he was told, was in London, staying at his club. Sims was an agreeable young man, good-looking and chatty, with a friendly manner, just the kind of manner Miss Peterson liked in a young man. She was a little tired of the company of the taciturn Hodgkins. She said, with some pride, that Mr. Beauchamp was a member of three London clubs, the United Tory, the Junior Unionist and the Grosvenor. He might be staying at any of them. Miss Peterson did not know which. By the time the car

was turned Sims had all the information he could reasonably expect to get. He saw no harm in allowing Hodgkins to find the Nyes' house.

'Left,' he said, 'sharp left.'

Hodgkins grumbled as he turned the car into the narrow, ill-paved lane which he had passed a few minutes before, the very lane which Sims had told him not to go up.

'The fourth house on the right,' said Sims.

Hodgkins pulled up.

'Can I be of any further help to you?' said Sims politely.

Hodgkins, though annoyed with Sims for his mistake in guiding, was quite willing to accept an offer of help.

'If you'd take the two dogs in to Mrs. Nye,' he said, 'Miss Peterson can carry the parcels and I'll get the car out of this.'

'We wouldn't trouble you', said Miss Peterson brightly, 'only that I'm afraid of dogs. I can't help always thinking that they're going to bite me, if you know what I mean, and anyhow, I've a lot of parcels to carry.'

She got out as she spoke. Sims handed her three parcels. Then he took the puppy in his arms and tugged at the spaniel's lead. Hodgkins backed the car slowly down the lane.

Mrs. Nye was at her door. So was every other woman who lived in the lane. The arrival of the car excited general interest and stimulated curiosity. No shiny Daimler had ever before entered their lane or stopped at one of their houses.

'This is Mrs. Nye,' said Sims, performing half an introduction.

He would have performed the other half if he had known Miss Peterson's name or who she was.

'Her ladyship's compliments,' said Miss Peterson, 'and she hopes the little boy will be pleased with the black dog. The puppy is from Mr. Hodgkins and he hopes the little boy will like it.'

Mrs. Nye looked at the spaniel. It was a creature of engaging manners. It stood on its hind legs, put its fore feet on her knee, tried to lick her hand and looked up at her with an expression of deep affection in its eyes. The puppy struggled in Sims' arms, apparently anxious to get away from him to Mrs. Nye. She was touched by the behaviour of the dogs, but she was a woman who had a loyal regard for her husband's feelings.

'I don't know', she said, 'as how Nye will let me take them. It'll be what he calls fawning on the bloated capitalist. And anyway, what about the money that Peter Boyd ran off with? Dogs is well enough, but what about the money?'

'I expect', said Sims, trying to be helpful, 'that it will be all right about the money.'

That was a comforting statement but vague. It might mean that Boyd did not run away with the money, or that having run away with it he would repent and give it back. Mrs. Nye sniffed. But it might mean—this thought came to her afterwards—that Lady Edith would make good the loss. Mrs. Nye smiled doubtfully. That seemed almost too good to be true.

Miss Peterson, who knew nothing whatever about the money, went on with the messages she had to deliver.

'Her ladyship's compliments,' she said, 'and there's a suit here for the little boy, a blue suit, with a lace

collar, and if it doesn't fit I have her ladyship's orders to alter it.'

'I don't know what Nye will say,' said Mrs. Nye. 'He's against taking anything from capitalists.'

Two of her neighbours, her two most intimate friends, joined the group at the door. They were both the wives of miners and both mothers of boys. They were not much inclined to pay attention to Nye's scruples, and they were both greatly interested in the blue suit.

'Why don't you ask the lady into the house?' said one of them.

'Instead of keeping her standing in the street,' said the other.

'Doesn't seem right to keep the lady standing,' said the first.

'You can come in if you like,' said Mrs. Nye.

Miss Peterson went in. Mrs. Nye followed her. So did the two women from the neighbouring houses. So did Sims, bringing the dogs with him. He did not quite understand what was happening but there seemed a possibility of useful news, a paragraph or two of useful news.

Miss Peterson opened the largest of her parcels and displayed the blue suit. The two neighbour women bubbled admiration. Even Mrs. Nye could not refrain from saying 'Ooh!' The suit was made of pale blue satin, very shiny. It consisted of knickers, very short in the legs and likely to be tight on any normal boy; and a wide blouse, gathered in folds into a waistband, with mother-o'-pearl buttons down the front and at the cuffs.

'A tasty suit,' said Sims. 'Your Alf will look nice in that, Mrs. Nye.'

‘Nye will be mad,’ said Mrs. Nye, but it was plain that the great splendour of the suit was overcoming her dread of Nye’s anger.

Miss Peterson opened another parcel and displayed a wide collar of cream-coloured lace. She opened a third and brought out a pair of white silk socks. She opened a fourth and laid a pair of blue satin shoes on the kitchen table. They were lady’s evening shoes, for blue satin shoes for boys are not easily attainable. Their heels were too high to be comfortable for Alf, but then, as Sims pointed out, he would not be expected to walk far in them.

‘Nye will never let him wear them,’ said Mrs. Nye.

Here the other two women joined in eager assertion of the natural rights of women.

‘Don’t you let Nye think he can have his own way all the time,’ said one.

‘If a woman isn’t to be allowed to dress her own children the way she likes,’ said the other, ‘where’s the use of her having children at all?’

‘A man should attend to his own business,’ said the first, ‘and nobody would object to his drinking his glass of beer. But when it comes to children, that’s the woman’s business.’

‘I wish it was my Eustace that was to have the suit,’ said the other. ‘There won’t be a boy in Sunday School such a swank as Alf’ll be when he’s wearing that suit.’

Mrs. Nye hesitated. Every word her neighbours said was true. But Nye had strong convictions, and his wife was all the more loyal to him because he was a sick man.

Then Alf Nye came in from school.

He gazed ecstatically at the two dogs. He sat

down on the floor and put his arms round the spaniel's neck. The spaniel licked his face. The puppy, realizing at once that this was a play-fellow, tugged at his bootlace.

'Her ladyship's wishes', said Miss Peterson, 'were that the clothes should be tried on and altered if necessary.'

Mrs. Nye could hardly object to that. The other two women were eager to support her ladyship's wishes, which were exactly the same as their own. Nothing could be more interesting than to dress Alf in the blue suit and see the result.

Alf himself was not consulted; but he was a good boy, brought up to do what he was told without protest. All he asked was to be allowed to hold the puppy in his arms while he was undressed and dressed again. The spaniel fawned on him. This made the business of trying on a little difficult, but four women, all of them determined and vigorous, are able to deal with a small boy and two dogs. The change of clothes was made, and Alf, a splendid figure, stood in the middle of the kitchen floor with four admiring women round him. Sims, standing near the door, repeated his praise of the blue suit.

'Tasty, I call it,' he said.

'The knickers is a trifle tight,' said one of the neighbours, stroking the satin which was stretched over the child's hips.

It was impossible to stroke the legs of the knickers, because there were no legs to stroke. Lady Edith had wished for short knickers, and Miss Peterson had been faithful to her trust.

'Knickers are worn tight now,' said Miss Peterson, who did not want the job of altering the knickers.

'Nye will never stand it,' said Mrs. Nye despondingly.

But the two neighbours were of opinion that Nye's feelings could and ought to be disregarded. They expressed themselves with vigour and decision.

'Her ladyship's wishes', said Miss Peterson, 'are that the little boy should stand beside her at the meeting to-night at the pit-head. It's her ladyship's intention to hold his hand while addressing the men.'

That settled the matter.

Nye would be in the pit, underground, until the hour of the meeting came. The clothes could therefore be put on the boy without his father's knowing anything about it. Nye's principles would certainly not allow him to be present at a Conservative meeting, therefore he would not see Alf in the blue satin suit. It could be taken off again before Nye did see him.

'Her ladyship's wishes', said Miss Peterson, 'are that the little boy's legs should be washed before the meeting.'

Alf's legs, especially his knees, required washing and Mrs. Nye recognized the fact without resentment.

'I'd take the knickers off if I were you, before I washed him,' said one of the women. 'Blue is a terrible colour for running if it gets wet.'

'I'll put him in a bath,' said Mrs. Nye.

Sims, a humane man, had no wish to see Alf enduring the torture of a bath. He had waited long enough to be sure that Mrs. Nye's scruples were overcome. He had his duty to do, the compelling duty of a journalist to his paper when there is news to be published. He hurried off to the post office and entered the telephone-box.

He began by ringing up the *Wessex Argus* to arrange that a photographer should be sent down, complete with a flash-light apparatus, to the Holycroft St. Mary meeting that night. A picture of Lady Edith Beauchamp outside the pit, surrounded by miners, Socialists to a man, holding the hand of a boy in a blue satin suit, the son of a leading Communist—that photograph would be pictorial news of the highest value. He himself, so he assured the editor, would furnish a report of the meeting and a couple of spicy paragraphs in time for the next day's issue.

Having settled that business he turned his thoughts to Charles Beauchamp. How was he taking the news of Boyd's disappearance? Did he mean to be at the pit-head meeting that evening? Why had he suddenly gone up to London and what was he doing there? These were interesting questions, and the readers of the *Wessex Argus* had, so it seemed to Sims, a right to have answers provided. The simplest way of getting answers was to put the questions to Charles Beauchamp himself. Sims had the names of three London clubs and Miss Peterson's assurance that Charles Beauchamp was at one of them.

He began with the United Tory, putting through a trunk call. He was told that Mr. Beauchamp was not in the club, had not been there for more than a fortnight and was not expected to be there. Mr. Sims tried the Junior Unionist. Mr. Beauchamp was not there either, had not been there for some time and was not expected. The business was becoming expensive, but Mr. Sims felt that the results, when he obtained them, would be worth the money. He tried the Grosvenor Club but that call was wasted. Mr. Beauchamp was not there.

Sims left the post office, thinking deeply. Charles Beauchamp was not at home. That seemed certain. The official explanation of his absence—it might be regarded as official, since Miss Peterson gave it and Hodgkins did not contradict her—was that he was in London, staying at one of his clubs. Like all official statements, this turned out to be untrue. Sims, a young man in years but old in experience, wondered why he had taken the trouble to test the truth of an official statement. He might and should have known that whatever else was true, it was certain to be false.

Where then was Charles Beauchamp?

Sims, thrilled to the marrow of his spine, began to hope that the Conservative candidate had also disappeared, suddenly, mysteriously. The news value of such an event was incalculable. Sims, the earliest and so far as he knew the only possessor of the information, might in a few hours find himself dispatching long telegrams to London papers. A glorious future opened before him. But Sims was no idle dreamer. Facts were the things to get. Indisputable, well-substantiated facts.

He thought things over for a few minutes. Then he retrieved his motor-cycle from the shed in which he housed it, kicked the thing into spluttering activity and dashed off to Nether Pemberton. Charles Beauchamp had been there the night before. That was certain. Charles Beauchamp had not been seen by anyone since then. That seemed tolerably certain. Therefore investigations ought to begin at Nether Pemberton.

For the second time that day the vicar, the schoolmaster and the Vice-President of the Women's Insti-

tute were called on to remember what had happened the night before.

Mr. Dodds, earlier in the day, had been cautious and discreet in his inquiries, but he had not been cautious and discreet enough. His questions—the questions he had been forced to ask—about the vicar's wife, had awakened the village mind, especially the mind of the Vice-President of the Women's Institute. By the time Sims began his inquiry, everybody except the vicar was ready to comment on the fact that Mrs. Priestly had left her home and Charles Beauchamp had left his on the same day.

Everybody, especially the Vice-President of the Women's Institute, said it was quite impossible to suppose that there was any connexion between the two disappearances, but it was undeniable that malicious and slanderous people might say very disagreeable things.

Nobody, Mr. Sims soon discovered this, believed that Charles Beauchamp and the vicar's wife had run away together. But everybody took the greatest pleasure in saying that this incredible scandal might be believed by those who did not know Mrs. Priestly or Charles Beauchamp or the vicar. The Vice-President of the Women's Institute said 'the dear vicar'. Sims, a little puzzled, and a good deal excited, rode back into Holycroft St. Mary. He saw at once that owing to the law of libel, he could make no immediate use of the gossip which he had picked up at Nether Pemberton; but he foresaw that very soon he would be able to use it, cautiously and discreetly. He felt certain that the vicar of Nether Pemberton would ask for a published contradiction of the rumour as soon as it came to his ears. That

would give Sims his opportunity for paragraphs even spicier than those about Lady Edith and her Little Boy Blue. 'Little Boy Blue' was good for a headline. Sims made a note of the phrase as soon as it occurred to him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE hooter sounded its evening blast. The labour of one shift was ended. The labour of another was to begin.

The engine above the shaft of Holycroft St. Mary pit worked noisily and fast. The steel rope wound itself round its drum. The cage rose from the black depths, discharged its load of men, slid down into the darkness again, rose again and again, bringing more men and more. Men straggled up from the village, the men of the night shift, and gathered round the mouth of the shaft. More men came from the village. Very few of those released from the pit went away. The crowd increased. It became dense round a hastily raised platform at the door of the engine-house.

Lady Edith timed her appearance neatly. Just as the upward-coming cage was discharging its last load, when the latest men of the night shift had reached the pit-head, she walked out of the manager's office beside the engine-house. Her dress, an evening dress though it was no more than six o'clock, was one of Madame Tzaan's most exquisite creations. Round her beautiful neck ropes of coloured beads shone and glittered. Miss Peterson had done her shopping thoroughly. She had bought almost all the bead necklaces on Woolworth's counter. The

ermine wrap, flung open over Lady Edith's shoulders, displayed its exquisite lining and its precious fur.

Lady Edith led little Alf Nye by the hand. The boy was in his satin suit, and Miss Peterson, watching from the door of the office, noticed with appreciation that the blue 'toned in' with the mauve of 'her ladyship's' dress.

Little Alf walked stiffly and awkwardly, partly because of the extreme tightness of the knickers and partly because of the height of the heels of his shoes, which threw him forward each time he put a foot to the ground in a way to which he was not accustomed. In spite of the discomfort and the risk of falling he managed to cling to the ribbon attached to the collar of the black spaniel, and the creature followed him willingly enough. The ribbon was pink, and Miss Peterson realized with a pang that though it went well enough with the black coat of the spaniel it clashed with the blue of the boy's suit and the mauve of Lady Edith's gown. It was Miss Peterson who had chosen the ribbon and she reproached herself for not having given proper consideration to the colour scheme as a whole. Miss Peterson, like many young women in her position, was an artist with an educated sense of colour value. Fortunately artists are rare. No one else noticed that there was anything wrong about the ribbon.

Mr. Dodds, carrying the Hodgkins puppy in his arms, followed Lady Edith and little Alf. He did not like carrying puppies. He did not like appearing in public in the company of small boys in pale blue suits. He did not like black spaniels with pink ribbons round their necks. But he was a good election agent, and he knew that to win the

suffrages of an enlightened democracy a candidate and his agent must do many strange and unpleasant things.

Lady Edith and her followers climbed the steps and stood on the platform.

The men in front of her cheered.

A crowd of English working men, recently released from toil, with the grime and sweat of it on their bodies, will always cheer a beautiful woman who stands before them in her splendour. The English are a chivalrous race and have a natural appreciation of beauty in women and horses.

A crowd of English working men is inclined also to cheer any one who displays affection for a child. Fondness of children is a national characteristic. Is there any other nation whose fathers will carry small babies in their arms while the wives do the marketing? Or, even without the excuse of a wife's presence, wheel perambulators about the streets of a town?

A crowd of English working men likes any one who likes dogs. The cult of the horse is dying out, wounded to death by the advance of machinery. Few Englishmen of the industrial classes now know how to handle a horse. Still fewer feel the charm of these animals. The case of the dog is different. No one has yet invented, or tried to invent a machine which will lick a man's hand or look up at him with eyes full of trust and loyalty. Perhaps no one ever will. Till he does, the place of the dog in the heart of Englishmen is secure, and the sight of a dog which is loved and kindly treated moves every one to a feeling of admiration for the dog's owner.

These were three good reasons why the miners

of Holycroft St. Mary cheered Lady Edith. She was beautiful. She held a child, one of their own children, by the hand. She had provided a pink ribbon for a black spaniel's neck.

There was still another reason why they cheered.

Sims was not the only man who had talked and been talked to at Nether Pemberton. A baker's messenger and a carrier had returned to Holycroft St. Mary from Nether Pemberton. They had talked and been talked to. Talk, like ether waves, passes through obstacles which seem impervious. The talk of the baker's man and the carrier, and the talk of those who talked to them, had passed through the crust of the earth. Not only the men of the night shift, who had been at home all the afternoon, but the men of the day shift who had been hewing coal at the bottom of the pit, knew that Charles Beauchamp had disappeared. They were inclined to suspect that he had deserted his wife. They thought it likely that he had gone off with some other woman, perhaps with the wife of the vicar of Nether Pemberton. A deserted wife, especially a very good-looking one, wins the sympathy of every right-thinking man. Lady Edith received tumultuous cheers.

She bowed, and bowed again. The reception was beyond anything she had dared to hope for. Mr. Dodds, behind her, wondered what had come over the men.

The cheers died down at last and Lady Edith spoke.

'You darlings,' she said.

Then, perhaps to show that she meant what she said, she stooped down and kissed little Alfred Nye

tenderly on the forehead. Mrs. Nye and her two friends had washed the boy from head to foot. Kissing him was not nearly such a trial as it had been the day before when his face was tear-blubbered and blood-spotted.

The men cheered again. It was scarcely possible not to cheer when Alf Nye in his pale blue suit was kissed by Lady Edith. But the cheers died down at last, as all cheers must. And as they died the wit who is present is every English crowd, seized his chance.

'My turn next, Lady,' shouted a youth at the back of the crowd. Everybody laughed and some minor imitative wits shouted 'And me, Lady,' 'And me.'

Lady Edith dropped Alfred Nye's hand for a moment and spread out her arms in a wide gesture of invitation.

'I only wish', she said, 'that I could kiss you all.'

Once more cheering was inevitable and cheering came.

Lady Edith dropped her arms, felt for Alfred Nye's hand and grasped it. She bent her head slightly. Her eyelids dropped, her face wore an expression of coyness and cunning.

'But what would my husband say if I did that?' she said.

Miss Peterson, still standing at the doorway of the office, drew her lips into a tight button of disapproval. Her ladyship, in Miss Peterson's opinion, was going a bit too far. She herself 'did not hold' with talk about kissing.

'My God, what a woman!' said Mr. Dodds in fervent admiration.

Nobody heard him, because as he spoke the puppy in his arms made a successful attempt to lick his mouth and so smothered the exclamation.

The crowd stood suddenly silent. Knowing what they knew or thought they knew, a mention of Lady Edith's husband was the last thing they expected. They did not know how to receive it.

Lady Edith seized the chance which the silence gave her.

'It's about my husband I came to speak to you this evening. My Charles! I want you to have him for your Charles too.'

A devoted wife who is ready to forgive and forget is an admirable creature and the English working man appreciates her virtues. But it is possible to carry tenderness too far, and the miners of Holycroft St. Mary felt that Charles Beauchamp was getting off too easily. They expressed their feelings with vigour.

'He's a blackguard!' 'He ought to be flogged!' 'Let him come to Holycroft St. Mary and we'll show him what we think of him!' So they shouted, and then some one called for groans for Charles Beauchamp. The groans were given, heartily. Lady Edith, utterly puzzled, turned to Dodds for enlightenment. But even Dodds had none to give. This outburst against Charles Beauchamp was something worse than any political rancour he had ever come across, though political rancour can be bad enough at election times.

Enlightenment, dim and partial, came to Dodds, though not to Lady Edith, when the groans died down.

'Why did he run away and leave you?' shouted a man.

Then came a woman's voice, from the outskirts of the crowd, where Mrs. Nye and her two friends were standing. They had come to see little Alf in his glory.

'Let us get at the hussy that took him from you!' It was Mrs. Nye who spoke. 'We'll teach her.'

'And a parson's wife too,' said the other woman. 'I never did hold with parsons.'

Lady Edith stood bewildered. The utterly unexpected nature of the attack on her husband left her for a time speechless and helpless. It was Dodds—a splendid election agent, Dodds—who attempted to do something to save an almost hopeless situation.

He dropped the puppy and stepped forward.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you are labouring under a complete misapprehension.'

'Shut up!' said somebody.

A crowd of Englishmen will stand a good deal from a woman, as long as she is content to be a woman and not claim equality with men. A man is different. Nobody had any feeling of pity or affection for Dodds.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said. 'Ladies' because he remembered the presence of Mrs. Nye. 'I assure you that you have been misled by malicious gossip, the origin of which——'

'Shut up!' said a voice again. 'Nobody wants to listen to you.'

That was obvious. But Dodds persevered, until Lady Edith grasped him by the arm and pulled him back. Dodds was glad enough to give up his attempt to speak. He stepped back, tripped over the puppy, which yelped, picked it up at once and had sufficient presence of mind to kiss it. The men liked that and stopped shouting at him.

Lady Edith took his place at the front of the platform. She was, or at all events successfully pretended to be, very angry. Her cheeks blazed red. Her eyes flashed. The Woolworth beads hanging from her neck rose and fell rapidly.

‘Don’t dare to say such things about my Charles!’ she said. ‘Don’t dare!’

‘Where is he then?’ said somebody in the crowd. ‘Tell us that. Where is he?’

‘Where’s your own candidate?’ said Lady Edith. ‘Where’s your Big Peter Boyd?’

The crowd laughed, laughed long and loud. The repartee was entirely to their taste. They could appreciate the value of a straight *tu quoque*.

Dodds, holding tight to the struggling puppy, realized that Lady Edith was far his superior in strategy. There is no sounder rule in war or politics than to attack, suddenly and frantically, when defence becomes impossible.

The crowd stood silent. It was a woman’s voice which answered Lady Edith’s question, Mrs. Nye’s voice.

‘He’s run off with my money,’ she cried, ‘the money you gave him for me.’

‘They’re a pair,’ said some one. ‘One of them has run off with Mrs. Nye’s money and the other with a parson’s wife.’

‘Be quiet, you beast,’ said Lady Edith, and she hissed the word ‘beast’ with fierce intensity.

Once more the men’s instinctive chivalry triumphed. The crowd realized that an attack on a helpless woman, who was also very good-looking and beautifully dressed, was a base and unmanly thing.

They turned on the interrupter who had taunted Lady Edith and her 'beast' was as milk to the wine of their invective.

'Bash his bloody head!' said some one, and other voices followed, urging a terrific punishment.

'You're what the lady called you, an ugly brute.'

'You're a——'

Lady Edith shivered slightly at the fierceness of the crowd. Miss Peterson, still in the door of the manager's office, put her fingers into her ears. Words were flying about which a super-superior lady's maid cannot listen to without a sense of personal defilement. Dodds expelled from his lungs a deep breath of relief. He had not been at all sure how the crowd would receive Lady Edith's attack on the interrupter. She had scored another triumph, and Dodds, better than any one else, appreciated the wonder of it.

'There's no one like her,' he muttered, and then oddly enough added, 'Thank God.'

In Dodds' opinion English politics would become a more difficult game to play even than it is if there were many more people like Lady Edith.

'Now,' said Lady Edith, 'you asked me where my Charles is, and I asked you where your Big Peter Boyd is.'

'And we told you.'

'Exactly,' said Lady Edith. 'And now I'm going to tell you where Charles is. Well, I'll tell you where he isn't to start with. He's not run off with another woman. Do you think, do you really think that he'd run away from *me*!'

Once more she dropped little Alf's hand and stretched out her arms. She threw back her head

and smiled, the radiant smile of a goddess, entirely sure of her divinity.

'From *me*,' she repeated, and with a splendid gesture flung far back from her shoulders the ermine wrap. The Woolworth beads glittered on her neck. Madame Tzaan herself would have found no fault with the sweeping lines and folds of her dress.

The argument was irresistible, unanswerable. There was not a man who did not feel the force of it. No one, neither Charles Beauchamp nor any one else, could possibly prefer another woman to Lady Edith.

She pressed her victory home.

'If my Charles', she said, 'was fool enough to do that, I wouldn't ask you to vote for him.'

The goddess mood had passed. She was coquette again with a twinkle in her eyes. Then, just as the men were beginning to laugh, she became serious.

'My Charles', she said, 'believes in the sanctity of the home. He loves his home.'

That, Dodds felt, was the very best line to take. An English audience will forget almost anything once its thoughts are turned to the sacredness of the home. If only she had the sense to stick to the sacredness of the home, anything might happen, even the transfer of miners' votes from Boyd to Beauchamp.

But Lady Edith, still confident that attack is the best defence, left the subject of home, without once saying either 'cradle' or 'fireside', a marvellous forbearance in an orator.

'I've told you one thing my Charles has not done,' she said. 'Now I'll tell you another. He hasn't run away with money belonging to a woman, a poor sick man and a little child.'

With true dramatic instinct she looked round for Alf. The child had escaped to the corner of the platform and was playing contentedly with the spaniel. Lady Edith picked him up in her arms. She kissed him again and then set him down and patted his head. The men, watching her, felt sure that Charles had never stolen money from a child. It was indeed, though they did not think of this, a thing of which no one had ever accused him.

'But where is he?' said Lady Edith. And there was dead silence, for every one wanted to hear where Charles Beauchamp was.

'He didn't tell me where he was going,' said Lady Edith, 'but I think I know. I think I know where my Charles has gone, because I know the sort of man my Charles is. He has gone after Big Peter Boyd to get Mrs. Nye's money back for her, and that', she added, 'is more than any of you did.'

'My God!' said Dodds. 'What a woman! She ought to be Prime Minister.'

Nobody heard him. Nobody would have heard him if he had shouted the words instead of muttering them. The crowd was cheering frenziedly.

'Now,' said Lady Edith, when quiet came at last, 'won't you all vote for my Charles?'

But that was asking a great deal. It was asking too much from men whose one firm conviction is that the salvation of England is to be found in Socialism. They could not, then and there, shake off their old creed and give their adherence to another. They did what all Englishmen do when faced with a difficulty. They compromised.

'We'll vote for you, lady!' they shouted.

CHAPTER XV

COMRADE HURST sat at the desk in the Labour Party's committee room. He was worried. Sergeant Mole had nothing to report about Boyd and his disappearance. Sergeant Mole was an exceedingly annoying man. Every time Hurst asked for news—and he asked five times during the afternoon—the sergeant said something meant to be reassuring, which, in fact, brought no comfort at all. He said that Boyd would certainly return in time for dinner, and Boyd did not. He said, later on, that Boyd, moved by some sudden impulse, had gone canvassing in a distant part of the constituency. Hurst knew that this was most unlikely. He said that Boyd had met some old friend unexpectedly, and gone off to spend the day with him. Hurst found it impossible to believe that Boyd would do such a thing without saying something about it.

Mrs. Nye's story of the stolen money was spreading. This worried Hurst almost as much as Boyd's disappearance. It was not that everybody believed the story. Perhaps nobody entirely believed it. But there it was, floating about like a dispersed cloud of deadly microbes. And it would do harm, incalculable harm to the cause of the Labour candidate, all the more harm because it could not be stopped. A wild beast can be killed. A snake can be cut

into two, but a cloud of mosquitoes or a swarm of microbes—— Hurst sighed and then cursed.

Then there was the Conservative meeting to be held at six o'clock at the pit-head. Hurst, like everybody else, had heard rumours of the disappearance of Charles Beauchamp. He had heard the scandalous story of a connexion between his disappearance and the absence from home of the wife of the vicar of Nether Pemberton. There was some comfort to be found there; but Hurst had the greatest difficulty in believing that any man would be fool enough to do such a thing just before an election. Surely Charles Beauchamp would have had sense enough to wait until the polling was over. Then it would make no difference what he did.

Hurst fidgeted uncomfortably, unable to settle down to work of any kind. Six o'clock came, and with the striking of the church clock, the sound of an outburst of cheering from the direction of the pit-head. Hurst shuddered and said 'Damn!' Charles Beauchamp might or might not be there. Whether he was or not, a meeting was certainly being held at the pit-head. Another burst of cheering followed. The meeting was evidently a successful and enthusiastic one. Comrade Hurst had not heard such whole-hearted cheers since the day when Boyd, at a mass meeting for miners, had boldly promised a four-hours-day, a thirty per cent rise in wages, and old age pensions at forty-five. Surely Charles Beauchamp or his representative had not ventured to bid higher than that. Then—Hurst sat up straight when he heard it—came the roar of deep-toned angry groans. The meeting was not, after all, a flaming success. Something had been said which enraged

the miners. There was no mistake about the meaning of the groans. The men were savage. It was like the growling of a hungry lion.

To Hurst, the groaning brought hope and a return of cheerfulness. Conservatives were fools. Hurst had always believed that, and now his faith was being justified. Charles Beauchamp, or some one in his place, was evidently as foolish as the rest. Perhaps he had recommended the shooting of all trade union leaders, or, even worse, he might have suggested the abolition of the dole. Hurst believed that Conservatives were capable of such madness. To his intense satisfaction the groaning went on and even grew fiercer. Hurst, still thinking of a lion which he had once seen in the Zoo just before feeding-time, was sure that such growling was the signal for biting and rending to come.

But just as Hurst began to feel a little happier there came more cheers. The meeting was in a good temper again. Hurst wondered what on earth had happened and was happening. He felt strongly inclined to go up to the pit-head himself. He might lurk, unnoticed, on the outskirts of the crowd. He would know whether Charles Beauchamp was there or not, and what he was saying. While he still hesitated the telephone bell rang.

He picked up the receiver.

'This is Sergeant Mole speaking. I want Mr. Hurst.'

'Yes. This is Hurst. Have you any news of Boyd?'

The sergeant did not answer that question. Being a very cautious man he seldom answered questions directly.

‘What make of car was Boyd driving last night?’ he asked.

‘Austin Seven,’ said Hurst. ‘Have you found it or heard of it?’

‘Do you happen to know the registered number?’

‘No, I don’t. But it was a brown touring car with a black hood, and had a bad dint in the left front mudguard.’

‘Could you identify it if you saw it?’

Hurst was quite sure that he could identify the car.

‘Then come along to Murder Bottom,’ said Sergeant Mole. ‘You needn’t hurry. If you’re there in half an hour it will be quite time enough. The car is still in the pool under the bridge and it will take some time to get it out.’

Then, with irritating deliberation, Sergeant Mole told his story.

A road surveyor, hearing of the breaking of the parapet of the bridge at Murder Bottom, went to investigate the damage. Being a conscientious and thorough man he had examined not only the parapet but the bridge itself. He had leaned over to see as much as he could of the structure of the arch. The river by that time was going down. The pool at the lower side of the bridge was still, as it always was, very deep. The surveyor saw nothing there. But on the other side the water was shallower, and the surveyor saw something which looked like a small car lying at the bottom. He left the bridge, climbed down to the river-brink. He took off his shoes and stockings, rolled up his trousers as far as he could and waded into the water. He could not get as far as the car for the water soon rose above his knees,

and it is not to be expected, even of a conscientious road surveyor, that he should deliberately wet the whole legs of his trousers, valuable garments likely to be injured by a soaking.

The surveyor waded ashore and cut a long stick from a tree near the bank. With this in his hand he waded in again and poked at the car, not with any hope of moving it, but to convince himself that the thing he had seen from the bridge really was a car. The poking made him sure. He waded ashore again, threw away his stick and put on his boots. Then, being a good and conscientious surveyor, he completed the notes he was making of the condition of the parapet. His duty was to present a report to the Rural District Council and he meant to do that duty properly.

After finishing his notes he drove into Nether Pemberton and told the police constable there about the car in the pool. The constable at once telephoned to Sergeant Mole.

Sergeant Mole—such is the admirable way in which a disciplined force acts—telephoned to Superintendent Lathom, at Winstock. Superintendent Lathom sent a breakdown gang from a Winstock garage to pull the car out of the river. He asked Sergeant Mole if he could find some one who might be able to identify the car. Sergeant Mole telephoned to Hurst. Hurst had been annoying him all day with inquiries about Boyd. He might perhaps stop asking questions if he were sent off to identify the car.

‘I’ll start straight away,’ said Hurst.

‘No hurry,’ said the sergeant placidly. ‘The breakdown gang is scarcely there yet.’

But Hurst started at once.

He arrived at Murder Bottom in time to see the rescue of the car. The breakdown gang, a most efficient party of men, rigged up a derrick. One man was let down into the water and attached ropes to the car. It was hoisted out of the pool and set on the lorry. It was a mere wreck, twisted, bruised and of course soaked, but Hurst recognized it as Boyd's Austin Seven.

'But where's Boyd?' he said.

One of the men of the gang nodded sideways at the river.

'Down there somewhere,' he said. 'Gone west, anyhow.'

'Must have skidded, I should think,' said another of the rescue party, 'trying to take the corner too fast, skidded into the far wall and then shot across and jumped this one.'

'That's about it,' said the other.

'Taking corners too fast on slippery roads', said a third, 'is asking for it. But the world's full of fools.'

'What about the body?' said Hurst. 'Can't you get it out?'

'That's the job of the police,' said one man.

The constable from Nether Pemberton, who was watching the proceedings, accepted the responsibility at once.

'I'll ring up Sergeant Mole,' he said, 'and he'll communicate with the Superintendent.'

'Anyhow,' said one of the motor-men, 'nothing can't be done to-night. Too dark.'

'Take that car back to Winstock', said the constable, 'and hand it over at the police-station. This matter will have to be investigated.'

Hurst drove back to Holycroft St. Mary. He had plenty to think about and his mind worked eagerly. He had no doubt that Boyd was lying dead at the bottom of the pool. His death at that moment was a very awkward occurrence. Was it possible, with only a week before nomination day, to find another candidate. Comrade Hurst was an altruist and an enthusiast. His first thought was not for his friend but for the cause. It would be a calamity if the Labour Party had no candidate, for Charles Beauchamp, a Conservative, would be returned unopposed. His next thought was a comforting one. Boyd's death would finally and completely dispose of Mrs. Nye's abominable accusation. Boyd had certainly not run away with her money. It would be found in his pocket when his body was recovered. Hurst, like all good election agents, was alive to the reaction of the popular mind to the stimulus of events. Boyd's reputation would not only be cleared. It would stand higher than ever. A charge successfully disposed of does not merely leave a man where he was before it was made. It raises him to a pinnacle which otherwise he would scarcely have attained. A man accused of murder but acquitted and shown to be innocent becomes a hero at once. If he had never been accused he would, though just as completely innocent, have remained a citizen of a commonplace kind. And the cause of Labour was at that moment identified with Peter Boyd. As Boyd's character rose in popular estimation so would the respect men felt for the Labour policy.

Then, once the body was recovered, there would be a funeral. Properly organized, a funeral would do more for the cause than fifty public meetings.

Hurst saw, in imagination, wreaths piled high on a hearse. Six or seven mourning coaches would follow the hearse, all full of wreaths. He saw a long procession of marching men. He saw, though dimly, for he was not quite sure what the word meant, a magnificent cortège. The funeral of a maligned but triumphantly vindicated Labour candidate would excite immense enthusiasm and might be enough in itself to secure victory in a doubtful election.

If only another candidate could be found! But Hurst did not know where to look for one.

Hurst reached Holycroft St. Mary, stopped at the Co-operative Stores and passed upstairs to his office. There he found Nye, looking gaunter and more haggard than ever, coughing piteously. With Nye were two dogs, a black spaniel and a terrier puppy. In his hand was a large parcel, roughly tied.

'Here,' he said. 'Take them.'

'Take what?' said Hurst.

Nye untied his parcel and displayed the blue suit which Alf had worn, the lace collar, the silk socks, the shoes, every garment which Miss Peterson had bought.

'Take them, and *them*,' he said, tugging at the leads on which he had the dogs. The spaniel was still held by the silk ribbon, the puppy had a piece of string tied to his collar.

'Take them', said Nye, 'and give them back to Peter Boyd, and tell him that his Jezebel can buy him but she can't buy me. He may sell his soul to the capitalists if he chooses and wear the cast clothes they throw to him, but my boy shan't.'

'Peter Boyd's dead,' said Hurst, 'so keep your foul tongue off him.'

'Dead!' said Nye. 'Boyd dead! Big Peter Boyd! He couldn't be dead.'

He was seized with a fit of coughing while he spoke, coughing which proclaimed the fact that there would be nothing strange in a report of his death. But Big Peter Boyd—strong, vigorous, full of eager vitality—how could he be dead?

'Motor accident,' said Hurst. 'The bridge at Murder Bottom. You know the place.'

'Boyd never had an accident,' said Nye. 'Boyd's not the kind of fool that has accidents.'

'Any one might have an accident,' said Hurst. 'Anyhow, Boyd had.'

'Seen the body?'

'No. I haven't. All I've seen is the wreck of the car.'

'When you see the body,' said Nye, 'look for a bullet hole in it.'

'What the hell do you mean by that?'

'I mean what I say. Where's Charles Beauchamp? Disappeared, isn't he? What does he want to disappear for? Hasn't he got everything in the world for his own?'

'They say it's a woman,' said Hurst. 'A parson's wife.'

'Woman! He can have as many women as he likes without running away with them. He can buy them as he thought he could buy me. He didn't run off for the sake of a woman. He ran off because he killed Boyd.'

'You're mad, Nye.'

'I'm not mad. Isn't that what they're always saying. "Shoot down the agitators. That's the proper way to treat them." Haven't I heard them say it?

“Whip the hounds to heel.” “Let them work or let them starve.” “Starving will teach them.” That’s what they say and that’s what they do, curse them. I’m to die before I’m forty, to fill their bellies with wine and put silks on the bodies of their whores. And Boyd’s to die because they were afraid of him. Accident! Motor accident! They may call it that, but I call it murder.’

Nye flung the clothes he held to the ground. He kicked the spaniel. Coughing till his body was bent, he left the room.

Hurst had heard talk like Nye’s before. He had heard too much of it. He did not for one moment suppose that Charles Beauchamp had murdered Boyd. The idea came from the diseased mind of a man driven mad by bitterness. But Hurst was aware that even fantastic lies have their value at election times.

Mrs. Nye had accused Boyd of theft. The charge was disposed of, and Boyd, who had been a popular man before, would become a popular saint and the cause of Labour would gain glory.

Now Nye will go about saying that Boyd had been murdered. Hardly any one will believe him, but all the same Boyd will appear as a martyr, and a martyr is a superior kind of saint, the very most splendid. How great then the further glory of the cause for which Boyd died and how certain the triumphant election of a Socialist—if only a candidate could be found.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS PETERSON—but this is wrong—she was Miss Peterson in Holycroft St. Mary when she was dressing up little Alf in his blue suit. She is Miss Peterson always in the housekeeper's room, but when entering Lady Edith's bedroom in the morning, she drops the 'Miss' and becomes, more briefly, Peterson.

Peterson, a tea-tray in her hand, bade good morning to Lady Edith. Lady Edith, never a very sleepy person in the morning, greeted Peterson cheerfully.

'Wasn't that a lovely meeting last night, Peterson? I simply adore those darling miners with their black faces—so democratic having a black face.'

'The little boy looked particularly nice, my lady,' said Peterson, and added, 'in my opinion,' to show that she had no intention of arguing if her ladyship thought otherwise.

'I wonder if it would have been better to have his face black too,' said Lady Edith.

'The washing of the child', said Peterson, 'was in accordance with your ladyship's wishes.'

Peterson set the tea-tray on a little table beside the bed. She re-arranged the pile of letters on the plate. They had slipped off it while the tray was moved. She laid the morning issue of the *Wessex Argus*, neatly folded, on the table beside the tray. She moved about

the room, stepping very softly. She shook out, folded and set in order the garments which she thought Lady Edith ought to wear. She put away in drawers and wardrobes other garments unsuitable for the morning. She passed through a curtained door into a bathroom, turned on taps, spread out a mat, draped a large towel over the back of a chair and dropped some scent into the running water.

Then she returned to the bedroom.

'Hodgkins', she said, 'was saying to Mr. Martin this morning, that your ladyship's speech was most effective.'

'I hope you thought so too,' said Lady Edith.

She liked Hodgkins' tribute, but flattery is a food which creates instead of satisfying the appetite.

'If your ladyship will excuse my saying so,' said Peterson, 'the Woolworth beads were scarcely the thing when worn along with your ladyship's ermine wrap.'

Lady Edith was a little disappointed. It seemed that Peterson had not listened to the speech.

'Oh, the beads?' she said. 'I don't suppose you want them, do you, Peterson?'

'No thank you, my lady,' said Peterson.

'Then put them away somewhere till we want them again, or keep them for a jumble sale.'

Lady Edith picked up her letters and glanced at them. She would not have confessed it to any one—she scarcely admitted it to herself—but she would have been glad to see her husband's writing on one of the envelopes. He was, of course, perfectly safe and probably quite happy. She did not allow her mind to dwell on the possibility of an accident. He had certainly not run away with the wife of the vicar of

Nether Pemberton. That idea was too absurd to trouble her. But Charles had disappeared, suddenly, without any warning, and she would have been glad to know where he was and what he was doing.

Lady Edith tossed her letters aside. Charles had not written. Other people had, at least a dozen other people. Their letters might be interesting but they could wait awhile. She poured out a cup of tea and sipped at it. She nibbled a slice of bread and butter. Then she picked up the *Wessex Argus*.

It is always interesting, though generally very annoying, to see our public utterances in print. Only the most hardened public speakers can open the paper without misgiving on the morning after an important meeting. There is always the possibility that in a moment of nervousness we may have said something exceedingly foolish. There is the certainty that if we have the reporter will have fastened on it and the editor put it in large print. There is also the possibility, indeed the probability, that the reporter has invented something himself, something disputable, dangerous, damning, and incorporated it into a perfectly harmless speech. And there is the possibility, by far the worst of all, that we have not been reported at all, or so briefly that the speech is meaningless.

From this fear Lady Edith was delivered at once. On the centre, the most important page of the *Wessex Argus*, was a two-column report of her meeting. At the top of it was a picture in which she appeared holding little Alf by the hand, with the two dogs plainly to be seen. Near the end of the second column was another picture, in which she appeared—her hat was quite recognizable—in the act of kissing little Alf.

So far this was entirely satisfactory. It only

remained to be seen whether she had said anything unusually silly and whether the reporter had put anything objectionable into her mouth. These things Lady Edith never discovered because she never read the report of her speech. Before she began to read her eye was attracted by an enormous headline.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE.

Lady Edith gasped with annoyance. 'Mysterious disappearance' suggested all sorts of horrible possibilities. Successful swindlers disappeared mysteriously. So did men suspected of murder. So did people who lost their memories, or said they did. Nothing could be worse for a candidate engaged in canvassing a constituency than an accusation of mysterious disappearance. It is difficult to say whether his chance of election would be more damaged by his commission of a crime or a confession of mental deficiency.

'Following the announcement in our late issue yesterday', she read, 'of the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Boyd, the Labour candidate for this division, we are faced to-day with the strange news that Mr. Beauchamp, the Conservative candidate, has also disappeared. The situation thus created is said to be unparalleled in English politics.'

Lady Edith gasped again. This time she was seriously angry.

There was a tap at the bedroom door.

'Peterson,' said Lady Edith, 'see who that is and tell whoever it is to go away at once.'

Peterson had stopped fidgeting with the brushes and scent-bottles on the dressing-table. She had gone

back to the bathroom to see to the temperature of the water. At the sound of Lady Edith's voice she came back to the bedroom, went straight to the door and opened it.

Between the door and Lady Edith's bed there is a tall screen. Peterson's voice at the other side of it was audible, but not her words. The voice of the person outside could just be heard. The talk, to Lady Edith a meaningless noise, went on. It went on for some time, and then Lady Edith's nerves, which were already strained, gave way.

'Stop whispering, Peterson,' she said, 'and send whoever that is away. I must get up at once.'

'It's Miller, my lady,' said Peterson. 'Mr. Martin sent her to say——'

Miller was the upper housemaid, quite a proper messenger for the butler to employ when his mistress is in bed and her own proper maid in attendance on her.

'To say what?' said Lady Edith, without giving Peterson time to finish her sentence.

'To say that Mr. Dodds is ringing up and wishes to speak to your ladyship.'

'Dodds?' said Lady Edith very irritably. And then more mildly after a moment's thought, 'Oh! Dodds. Yes.'

It occurred to her that Dodds had probably seen the *Wessex Argus* and would have something to say about the announcement of Charles Beauchamp's disappearance.

'I told Miller', said Peterson, 'to inform Mr. Martin that your ladyship was dressing and that if convenient, would Mr. Dodds ring up again in about an hour.'

'Peterson,' said Lady Edith, 'you've less sense than

any maid I ever had. Of course I want to speak to Mr. Dodds at once. Run after Miller. Run to Martin and tell him to hold the line till I come.'

Peterson did not actually run, but she overtook Miller at the bottom of the staircase, passed her and got to Martin, who was standing patiently with the telephone receiver in his hand.

Lady Edith, without another sip of tea, jumped out of bed, seized a dressing-gown and thrust her feet into a pair of slippers. Peterson, like a good maid, had left these things ready.

Two minutes later she took the telephone receiver from Martin's hand.

'That you, Mr. Dodds? Have you seen this morning's paper?'

'Yes,' said Dodds. 'That's what I rang you up about. We must contradict this statement at once and definitely. It will do untold harm.'

'Contradict it, then,' said Lady Edith. 'Ring up the editor and say that we insist on an immediate contradiction and an apology. A special edition if necessary.'

'Quite so,' said Dodds. 'I've done that. But the editor says——' Here he hesitated.

'Says what? Surely he can't refuse to publish our contradiction?'

'No, no. He doesn't refuse. He's most friendly. Distressed and so on. But he says—— Well, the fact is, he says that contradiction won't be much use, won't carry conviction unless he can say at the same time where Mr. Beauchamp is.'

'Tell him,' said Lady Edith, 'tell him that Mr. Beauchamp——'

Here she stopped short. Some one was breathing

heavily quite close to her, so close that it seemed as if the breathing came right into her ear. She turned and saw Peterson beside her.

‘Your ladyship’s boudoir cap,’ said Peterson.

She had in her hands a very pretty cap, something like a sunbonnet in shape, made of lace, and held in shape by a pale pink silk ribbon. Peterson had run, really run, upstairs to get it, and had run down again. She was panting, and that was why her breathing sounded very loud to Lady Edith.

‘Damn my cap!’ said Lady Edith.

She was not a lady who often swore. Indeed, she had never once said ‘damn’ since she was a girl in the schoolroom, though then she had said it ten times over in quick succession because she wanted to know what it felt like to be really wicked. The sensation was disappointing, so she never used the word again until it was forced from her by Peterson’s imbecility. Then she learned the value of a Damn. It relieved her feelings, steadied her nerves and enabled her to speak with calm assurance to Dodds.

‘Tell him’, she said, ‘that Mr. Beauchamp is in London, staying at his club. You can say important political business if you like.’

‘I said that,’ said Dodds. ‘In fact I said he had gone to attend a meeting of the party leaders, private meeting of course, at the Junior Tory Club, but the editor—well, the fact is, he didn’t believe me.’

‘Tell him I say so,’ said Lady Edith.

‘I’m afraid that’s no use, no use at all. It appears that one of the *Argus* reporters, a man called Sims, telephoned yesterday to all Mr. Beauchamp’s clubs, including the Junior Tory.’

‘Well?’

'He wasn't there. He wasn't at any of his clubs. Wasn't expected. Hadn't been seen, in fact.'

'But he must be there.'

'He isn't,' said Dodds, 'and the worst of it is that the editor knows it.'

'Then where is he?'

'I rather hoped', said Dodds mildly, 'that you might be able to tell me that.'

'Something', said Lady Edith, 'must be done at once.'

Dodds was very much of the same opinion, but he had nothing to suggest except that he should go to Melcombe Court at once and talk the matter over with Lady Edith.

Half an hour later—Lady Edith had dressed very rapidly—they were together in the library.

'I stopped a few minutes at Holycroft St. Mary on my way over,' said Dodds. 'Sims was there——'

'The newspaper reporter?'

'Yes. He'd ridden over from Winstock on a motor-bike.'

'I hope you told him what you thought of him,' said Lady Edith. 'It was monstrous impertinence to go publishing things like that about Charles. I hope you spoke strongly.'

Dodds had not spoken strongly. In fact he had made no attempt to rebuke Mr. Sims for his indiscretion. What he wanted was not vengeance or even satisfaction, but information. He had got it.

'Things are more serious than I thought,' he said. 'It appears that they've found Boyd's car in the river under the bridge at Murder Bottom.'

'Drunk when he was driving home, I suppose,' said Lady Edith, who had a low opinion of all members of

the Labour Party. 'That would account for his driving into the river.'

'They haven't found the body yet,' said Dodds. 'But the police are to drag the river to-day. In fact, they're probably at it now.'

'Well, I hope they'll find it, but I don't see what it has to do with Charles, anyway.'

'I was just coming to that,' said Dodds. 'It's absurd of course. It's ridiculous. It's monstrous. It's anything you like to call it, but everybody in Holycroft St. Mary is saying that Mr. Beauchamp murdered him.'

'Charles murder Boyd! Why, Charles wouldn't murder a kitten.'

'Quite so,' said Dodds. 'And I don't suppose any one believes it, really believes it. But everybody is saying it. And that sort of thing does harm. Voters are so suspicious, you know. And it'll be all over the constituency this evening. It's incredible. Everyone will see that; but Mr. Beauchamp's unfortunate disappearance just at this moment—— What they're saying is that he bolted to escape arrest.'

'They were saying yesterday', said Lady Edith, 'that he'd run away with a parson's wife.'

'I'd much rather they said that. That would lose us a few votes, of course. But nothing like so many as this story.'

'What are we to do?' said Lady Edith.

'There's only one thing to do. We must get into touch with Mr. Beauchamp at once.'

'But we can't. How can we? I haven't the faintest idea where he is.'

Then the telephone bell rang, at Dodds' elbow.

'Shall I see who it is?' said Dodds.

Lady Edith nodded and he picked up the receiver.

For about two minutes she suffered the torment of listening to half, the unimportant half, of what appeared to be an important conversation. 'Yes.' 'Mr. Dodds, Mr. Beauchamp's election agent.' 'What's that?' 'Good God!' 'Yes. Certainly. At once.'

He laid down the receiver and turned to Lady Edith.

'That was Lathom speaking,' he said, 'the police inspector in Winstock. His men have been dragging the river for Boyd's body. They haven't found it, but they have come on another car at the bottom of the deepest part of the pool. It's a Dodge car and they think it may be the one that Mr. Beauchamp was driving. They want us to send over some one to see it, to identify it, if it's his. There must have been an accident—— I hope that Mr. Beauchamp—— Lady Edith, believe me that I am exceedingly sorry, distressed beyond words.'

But Lady Edith, oddly enough, was smiling quite cheerfully.

'Oh, don't you fret about Charles,' she said. 'He's not at the bottom of the river.'

'I hope not,' said Dodds. 'I sincerely hope not. After all, we don't know yet that it's his car. Until we're sure of that we needn't anticipate evil.'

'Even if it is his car,' said Lady Edith, 'Charles isn't drowned. That's not the sort of thing that happens to Charles.'

'Any one', said Dodds, 'might meet with an accident.'

'Not Charles,' said Lady Edith. 'Or if he did he wouldn't be hurt. You don't know Charles as well

as I do, Mr. Dodds, but you may take my word for it he's not that kind of man.'

'I hope you're right,' said Dodds. 'I sincerely hope you're right.'

'Ring the bell,' said Lady Edith. 'We'll send Hodgkins to look at the car.'

Then the telephone rang again.

It was Inspector Lathom to ask whether he could be supplied with the registered number of Mr. Beauchamp's car. The Dodge had been fished out of the pool and the number plate was intact, almost the only thing about the car that was. Lady Edith supplied the wanted number at once. ZP1438.

Mr. Dodds repeated it to the inspector. There was another short talk. Then he turned to Lady Edith.

'I'm afraid it is Mr. Beauchamp's car,' he said. 'The number proves that.'

'I am so glad,' said Lady Edith.

'Glad!' said Dodds. 'Glad!'

Lady Edith was an amazing woman. Her handling of the miners at Holycroft St. Mary had astonished him the night before. Her reception of the news of her husband's sudden death—that was what it came to—left Dodds breathless. She actually said she was glad.

'Charles always hated that car,' she said. 'I sometimes thought that I oughtn't to have made the poor lamb drive it. Though of course one must be democratic nowadays. Now of course he won't have to drive it any more. I shouldn't think it could be mended, should you?'

'From what Lathom tells me,' said Dodds, 'I should say not.'

'That'll be a tremendous comfort to Charles,' said

Lady Edith. 'And now', she went on after a slight pause, 'they won't be able to go on saying that Charles murdered Peter Boyd. If both cars were lying side by side at the bottom of the river we might just as well say that Peter Boyd murdered him.'

Dodds jumped up from his chair. To Lady Edith's immense surprise he seized her hand and shook it heartily.

'Brilliant,' he said, 'positively brilliant. We'll pull the election out of the fire yet. Thanks to you, Lady Edith, thanks entirely to you.'

Lady Edith looked sadly at her hand. Dodds had hurt it a good deal, and she had no very clear idea what he was talking about.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'I must rush off at once. I must catch Sims. He was in Holycroft St. Mary when I left him, and he'll be there still, I expect. But he may leave at any moment and I haven't an idea where he's going next.'

'Sims?' said Lady Edith. 'Isn't that the newspaper man? Such an exhausting life, I always think, but I daresay quite exciting. What do you want to see him for?'

'To tell him', said Dodds, 'that Boyd murdered Mr. Beauchamp and then threw both cars into the river to conceal the crime.'

'But how ridiculous!'

'It was your idea,' said Dodds. 'And it's the most brilliant electioneering move I ever heard of. If Sims gets that story going the seat is as good as won.'

Dodds was a good election agent and had the cause of Conservatism at heart. Charles Beauchamp might be and probably was at the bottom of the pool under the bridge. That was deplorable, but another candi-

date could easily be found, and his triumph was sure if the electors could be persuaded even to whisper to each other that Boyd had murdered his rival.

‘But surely’, said Lady Edith, ‘you don’t really think——’

‘Of course not,’ said Dodds. ‘Peter Boyd would no more murder Mr. Beauchamp than Mr. Beauchamp would murder him. But that’s not the point. If we can get it said, generally, through the constituency, that Mr. Beauchamp is a martyr—— Why, we’ll not only win, we’ll have a thumping majority.’

CHAPTER XVII

MR. SIMS suffered a disappointment. He was the first journalist to announce that both candidates for the Mid-Southeater Division had disappeared. He was in a position to hint at the possibility of murder, the murder of the Conservative by the Socialist, or the murder of the Socialist by the Conservative. From Mr. Sims' point of view it did not matter which was the criminal and which the victim. Either way the thing was news. He could hint, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that there had been misappropriation of public funds by one absconding candidate and the abduction of a married woman by the other.

All these stories were flying about from mouth to ear through the constituency, and though it was very unlikely that anyone believed any of them—even Nye was not really convinced of his—they formed most exciting subjects of conversation. They ought to have brought fame and other rewards to Mr. Sims, who hoped to be appointed Special Correspondent to several London daily papers.

He was disappointed. No paper would print much about the disappearance of the two candidates. No London paper would print anything at all. Editors everywhere had a wholesome dread of the law of libel, and, being able editors, realized that the dis-

appearance of the two candidates had not anything like the news value which Mr. Sims supposed. The country was in the middle of a general election. Candidates everywhere were saying the most surprising things, 'adumbrating' policies, and making promises which cried aloud for newspaper comment, and got it. There was little or no space left to describe a mere disappearance, which might in the end turn out not to be a disappearance at all.

But Mr. Sims, though disappointed by the reception of his chief news, reaped an unexpected reward with the story of the milk lorry which had run away all by itself, unguided, and, without the help of its engine, travelled for ten miles along a road across the downs.

The story was taken up by one of the ablest of the London editors. News, other than election news, was scanty, and the public was beginning to get tired of the election. The editor gave them instead, in large print on his chief page, Sims' tale of the runaway lorry. He called it the Milk Lorry Mystery, and his astuteness was justified. The public was excited and a brisk argument, in the form of letters to the editor, followed. The facts appeared to be beyond dispute. A milk lorry, with inefficient brakes, was left untended on the top of a hill. Except the two men in charge of it, who had got down to load up some milk-churns, there was nobody else on the road. Sam Pratt and Bert Jones were prepared to swear that they had seen no one since they started on their round, had passed no one, had met no one and that the road when they got out of their lorry was entirely deserted. The lorry, owing to the inefficiency of its brakes, began to run down the hill.

That, so far, was a simple and uninteresting story. It was after that that the excitement began.

The lorry gathered such speed in its descent that it was carried up the next hill on a road like a switch-back railway. It had gone on rushing down hills and climbing up other hills for ten miles until it came to rest, uninjured, in a ditch, a mile outside Danesbury.

Somebody signing himself D.Sc. wrote a letter to the paper to say that this was not only possible but inevitable, quoting a remark which he attributed to Archimedes, 'Action and reaction are equal and opposite.' Next day somebody else, signing himself 'A Mere Mechanic', wrote a letter pointing out that D.Sc. and Archimedes had forgotten to reckon on the co-efficient of friction, a subject which, so he said, Sir Isaac Newton had treated at some length. At this stage of the controversy the portraits of Sam Pratt and Bert Jones were published, marked with crosses. A mathematician then wrote a letter calculating to nine points of decimals the chances of an uncontrolled vehicle running without a swerve for ten miles, even supposing the road were quite straight and the co-efficient of friction ignored. Along with this letter the editor printed a contour map of the road, showing its up-and-down character.

An Oxford don, of whom nobody had ever heard before, but who was described as 'the well-known archaeologist', wrote a long letter about the fondness of the Romans for straight roads, quoting, in Latin, a sentence from the *De Bello Gallico* to show that Julius Caesar had a passionate dislike of corners. Then a gentleman who chose to be known as 'Common

Sense ' lost his temper and said briefly that the lorry had not run ten miles by itself because no lorry could. The thing was impossible and that was the end of it. So he said and, no doubt, thought, but he was wrong. That was not the end of it.

The next day Sam Pratt's statement was reprinted, with his signature and that of Bert Jones reproduced in *facsimile*. Alongside of the statement was a map of the road marked off in miles, with a cross showing the spot where the lorry started and another showing the ditch in which it was found. The distance, to the confounding of 'Common Sense', appeared as exactly ten miles.

Then an ardent believer in Christian Science, reverting to the letter of 'Mere Mechanic' which by this time was nearly forgotten, said that there was no such thing as a co-efficient of friction unless people were fools enough to believe in it ; that a lorry, being inanimate, could not be credited with such a belief ; and that therefore, *for the lorry*, friction, either with or without a co-efficient, simply did not exist, and that life for human beings, as well as for lorries, would be a far happier thing if only the world could be induced to accept the truth. To this the editor replied by printing in enormous type Sam Pratt's original explanation of what had happened : 'It's a blooming miracle, that's what it is.'

It was generally felt that this really was the last word, for the British public though it does not believe in miracles, wishes that it did and likes to quote, incorrectly, a tag from Hamlet about there being more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. Besides, the nomination day of the candidates had come, and interest in the general

election was beginning to revive. 'After all,' so people said when they had quoted Hamlet two or three times, 'this is a really critical election, and the unopposed returns will show that in spite of what the other side says the heart of our great democracy is in the right place.'

In the Mid-Southeaster Division the supporters of both candidates worked hard. Lady Edith addressed meetings organized for her by Mr. Dodds. She still talked about Cheerful Charlie and dear Charles. But it became more and more difficult to produce any plausible account of his absence.

Comrade Hurst did his best with a new slogan invented for him by an enthusiastic young woman, an assistant schoolteacher, called Miss Benson. 'Beauchamp the Bunker', was her idea. It showed in the first place the beauty of alliteration and, a more important thing, the value of slang in an appeal to the electorate. It is true that bunk and bunker have of late years somewhat vanished from the conversation of simple men, but everybody still knows what they mean, and they convey the feeling of familiar friendliness between the speaker and the listener which is never achieved by the use of classical words. Besides, Beauchamp really had 'bunked', and though a slogan gets on perfectly well without any relation to fact, it is certainly an advantage when it can be shown that it expresses a truth.

Comrade Hurst, with a hopeful eye on the future, added the words 'is Beaten', and the available walls and gates all over the constituency were placarded with huge posters: 'Beauchamp the Bunker is Beaten.' This annoyed Lady Edith, but not for very long. She had another series of placards printed

and posted. 'Bank on Beauchamp. Beauchamp the Banker does not abscond.'

It was a pity that no synonym for 'Abscond' beginning with a B could be found, but the hit at Boyd's reputation was unmistakable, and Lady Edith made her meaning quite clear by sending another ten-pound note to Mrs. Nye, to make up for the money which had vanished with the Labour candidate.

Unfortunately Nye found out about the second ten-pound note and caused great embarrassment to Comrade Hurst by announcing publicly that he meant to burn the note in a brazier outside the Co-operative store in a brazier set up by a gang of road repairers. This announcement caused great popular indignation. The women said that the money belonged to Mrs. Nye and that her husband had no right to burn it. They threatened that if he put the note into the brazier they would put him, or if not the whole of him at all events his head, into the same brazier.

The men were less personal, more detached and far more scientific in their condemnation of Nye's project. They pointed out that money, all money, might and should be used for paying wages. From this it followed that the more money there is in existence the higher the wages that can be paid. Therefore—the argument is perfectly logical—anyone who diminishes the amount of money in the world strikes a blow at the wage earners. Nye, by burning a ten-pound note, would diminish the amount of money in the world by that amount, therefore Nye was a traitor to his class and must be prevented from carrying out his threat.

Nye was obstinate and Comrade Hurst, who did not want a breach of the peace in Holycroft St. Mary,

was in a difficult position. Things were made worse by the arrival of another ten-pound note in a registered envelope, addressed to Mrs. Nye. There was no letter to show where this money came from. But the writing on the envelope was recognized. It was Peter Boyd's and there seemed no doubt that it was he who sent the second note.

This cleared his reputation, which was satisfactory, but in other ways it made the situation worse. Nye declared that he would burn both notes and the popular opposition doubled in intensity. Quite rightly. If it is wrong to burn one ten-pound note it must be twice as wrong to burn two.

It was Miss Benson, the schoolmistress who invented the Beauchamp Bunker slogan, who found a way out of the difficulty. She was a very clever young woman, and her plan was satisfactory to every one. It allowed Nye to have his conflagration. It safeguarded the interests of Mrs. Nye, and it pacified the popular mind. It was also, like all great plans, perfectly simple. She took the two ten-pound notes from Mrs. Nye and lodged them both to her own credit in the local branch of the City and Suburban Bank. Then she gave Mrs. Nye a cheque for twenty pounds. Nye burnt the cheque, with a superb gesture meant to express his contempt for capitalism, charity and other wicked things. Miss Benson wrote another cheque which Mrs. Nye cashed three days later. The only loss suffered by any one was the twopenny stamp on the first cheque, and this Miss Benson, very generously, bore herself.

It did not occur to any one, not even to the schoolmistress, to return the second note to Lady Edith.

Dodds had his difficulties too. Mr. Priestly, the

vicar of Nether Pemberton, heard the story of his wife's elopement with Charles Beauchamp. He was exceedingly annoyed. He wrote a stiff letter to Lady Edith demanding a denial of the story, to be dictated by him and published at Charles Beauchamp's expense in the *Wessex Argus*.

Lady Edith showed the letter to Dodds.

'So sweet of him, poor dear,' she said, 'but so mid-Victorian. Just like the awful dresses they used to wear in the last century. There are pictures of them in the old *Punches*. You know the ones I mean, very long with huge sleeves. I didn't know any one wore them now. I wonder where that poor little vicar's wife got one. I shouldn't have thought that even in a jumble sale—— But perhaps it was once her mother's.'

Dodds was a little confused by this unexpected reference to Mrs. Priestly's clothes. But he kept a firm grip on the chief point at issue.

'I'm inclined to think', he said, 'that we shall make things worse if we publish the contradiction the vicar wants.'

'People are so inclined to believe anything that's contradicted,' said Lady Edith. 'I know I am, even if I wasn't before. I always think that nobody would contradict a thing if it wasn't true.'

'Exactly,' said Dodds. 'And we don't want any unnecessary publication of that story.'

'Still,' said Lady Edith, 'we ought to think about the vicar's wife, poor darling. Clergymen's wives so seldom get run away with by any one, do they? So dull for them, and how she would love it if every one believed that she was leading a beautiful scarlet life with Charles!'

'The vicar says', Dodds was re-reading Mr. Priestly's letter, 'that she's with an aunt in Eastbourne.'

'So silly of him to say Eastbourne,' said Lady Edith. 'As if Charles would take her there. Eastbourne is so respectable. Most unsuitable. If he'd said Paris now. People would be so much more likely to believe in Paris.'

'But the vicar doesn't want people to believe it.'

'Don't be silly, Mr. Dodds. If he didn't want it to be believed, why did he ask us to contradict it? Of course he's simply loving the whole thing, and so is she. And how bored poor darling Charles would be if he'd done it.'

'I wish to goodness we knew where he is,' said Dodds desperately. 'If we could only give an address to which his letters could be forwarded it would do something to stop all this talk. It's ruining his chances of election, absolutely ruining them.'

'There are piles and piles of letters for him,' said Lady Edith. 'After every post Martin brings in a fresh stack on a salver and asks me if I wish to re-address them. So silly of him when he knows I can't. And even if I could I wouldn't. Poor Charles hates answering letters more than almost anything. He'd never forgive me if I sent him on a hundred or so. But anyhow, I can't.'

'I wonder——' said Dodds, and then paused doubtfully.

'Would you care to see them?' said Lady Edith encouragingly.

'It's just possible', said Dodds, 'that there may be something among his letters which would give us a hint as to where he is.'

'There won't be one from the vicar's wife,' said Lady Edith.

'I wasn't thinking of that. My idea was that if you didn't mind——'

'Oh, I'll open them for you if you like,' said Lady Edith. 'Charles will have no objection. In fact he generally asks me to, hoping that I'll answer them for him, poor dear. And I often do. Otherwise they wouldn't be answered, and that would be worse than running away with a vicar's wife, wouldn't it? I mean to say a man might be elected if he did that, but I don't see how he could be if he never answered letters.'

The examination of Charles Beauchamp's correspondence was a tedious business. There were about thirty letters asking for a plain statement of his views on Free Trade and Protection. Another dozen writers preferred the term Empire Free Trade to Protection but made the same demand on Charles. There was a large number, set aside in a separate pile by Dodds and marked 'Miscellaneous', which wanted Charles to pledge himself to abolish such things as Trade Unions, Old Age Pensions, Income Tax and Compulsory Education. Dodds, becoming more methodical as the work went on, docketed a bundle under a label marked Temperance.

One or two of these wanted complete freedom for the sale of alcoholic drinks, no licenses, no prohibited hours, no excise duties. One or two others demanded the total abolition of all sales. Between the two extremes were letters advocating every conceivable modification of the present system.

At last there was only one letter left, a large sealed envelope, made of very good paper, bearing on its

flap in embossed letters the name of the City and Suburban Banking Co. It had been left to the last because both Lady Edith and Dodds guessed what it contained. Charles Beauchamp's bank pass-book. The postmark was a London one, and Lady Edith explained this :

'Charles always likes to keep his overdraft in London,' she said, 'so embarrassing when every one in one's own neighbourhood knows how much one owes.'

It was a surprise to Dodds that a man as rich as Charles Beauchamp should find it necessary to overdraw his current account in the bank. It suddenly struck him that perhaps Charles was in financial difficulties and had run away from them.

'I wonder', he said, 'if you would take the responsibility of opening that envelope. His bank-book might give us some indication, some hint——'

'Oh, I'll do it if you like,' said Lady Edith. 'Charles never minds my knowing about his money. But the bank evidently hasn't got his address. They've sent the book here.'

CHAPTER XVIII

A LONG with the bank pass-book was a letter written by a courteous clerk and signed by Mr. Pemberton, the manager of the bank. It supplied some information, though not very much and not of a very useful kind.

‘In reply to your letter of June the fifth,’ Dodds read, ‘enclosing pass-book, we now have pleasure in returning same, written up to date as requested.’

Charles Beauchamp had evidently sent his pass-book to the bank on June the fifth asking to have it written up. That was two days before the whist drive at Nether Pemberton. The bank officials, working diligently, had made the necessary entries and posted the book back to Melcombe Court on June the ninth, the second day after Charles’s disappearance. There was nothing the least unusual and certainly nothing helpful so far. But a glance at the pass-book itself startled Dodds and awakened Lady Edith’s interest.

The figures showed an overdraft on June the fifth of £120, largely increased on June the eighth to £620 by the debiting of a single cheque for £500. Charles’s credit was evidently very good. The bank had paid the cheque and had not made the slightest protest afterwards. Dodds at once gave up his theory of flight from financial difficulties. It never was a convincing theory, but Charles Beauchamp was a rich

man and it seemed impossible to suppose that he had wasted all his money and become embarrassed. It was certain that no man in such a position would be allowed by a bank to draw a cheque for £500 on an account already a good deal overdrawn.

‘If he wrote a cheque on June the seventh’, said Dodds, ‘it looks as if he had his cheque-book with him.’

‘But he hadn’t,’ said Lady Edith. ‘I saw it on his desk yesterday.’

She hurried over to Charles’s writing-table and found his cheque-book. Some of the blocks were filled in and fortunately the latest was one of them. It showed that a cheque had been drawn on June the fourth in favour of Hodgkins, apparently a payment of wages. There was no sign of any cheque for £500. The number on the £500 cheque entered in the pass-book was K4593 and this did not correspond with the numbers in Charles’s cheque-book which ran in a series beginning H3281.

‘Rather odd,’ said Dodds. ‘But of course he may have gone to the bank and got another cheque-book. That’s what he’d do if he found he’d forgotten his own, either ask for a new book or else for a single cheque.’

As he spoke the door of the library opened and Lord Eppington, supporting himself on two sticks, stumbled in. Lady Edith ran over to him and kissed him warmly.

‘Daddy darling,’ she said, ‘what are you doing here? You ought to be in bed.’

‘Of course I ought to be in bed,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘But how the deuce am I to stay in bed when Charles is playing fast and loose with the Ten Com-

mandments. I say the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments.'

'But your sciatica, dearest one,' said Lady Edith.

'Sciatica! Don't be a fool, Edith. How the deuce can I have sciatica when my son-in-law is running away with other men's wives and committing murder at the same time. A man in my position can't have sciatica—I say can't have it, when that sort of thing is going on. But it's devilish hard on me, Edith. I hope you realize that. Devilish hard, and deuced inconsiderate of you and Charles. Can't think what young people are coming to nowadays. No consideration for their parents. I say none. None.'

'But, Daddy darling,' said Lady Edith, 'Charles hasn't run away with anybody's wife.'

'Don't talk nonsense. If he hasn't, why the devil does everybody say he has? Of course he's run away with her. I don't want to be hard on him. Lots of fellows do it. Never did myself, but I know scores of men who have and were none the worse afterwards. I say none the worse. But Charles oughtn't to have done it in the middle of an election. That sort of thing loses votes. People are always down on a candidate who does it.'

'So sweetly Victorian of them,' said Lady Edith.

'But Charles hasn't.'

'I don't say that man Boyd ought not to be shot,' said Lord Eppington. 'All those fellows ought to be shot, or hanged. I say hanged. But Charles ought not to have done it. Confound it all, Edith, your husband is a gentleman. He ought to leave that kind of thing to the common hangman. Not Charles's job at all. I say not Charles's job.'

'Dearest one,' said Lady Edith, 'Charles didn't.'

‘ I never said he did,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘ All I say is that everybody’s saying so, and it’s deuced inconsiderate of Charles and you just when every vote is of importance and I was trying to have a few days’ quiet to try and get rid of my sciatica. If Charles hasn’t run away with that parson’s wife—— Mind you, I don’t want to be too hard on him if he has. Only he oughtn’t to do it just now—— And if he hasn’t shot that pestilential scoundrel Boyd, then he ought to come forward and say so frankly, instead of hiding behind your petticoats, Edith. Deuced cowardly thing to do, hiding behind his wife’s petticoats, and you oughtn’t to encourage him. What I want to know is where is Charles ? ’

Here Dodds, whom the earl had not so far noticed, thought he ought to say something.

‘ That, my lord,’ he said, ‘ is what Lady Edith and I were discussing when you came in.’

‘ Who is this ? ’ said the earl to his daughter. ‘ Who the deuce is this ? ’

‘ Mr. Dodds, dearest one,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ Charles’s election agent. Now, don’t get annoyed, Dads, so bad for your sciatica.’

‘ Oh, you’re Dodds, are you ? ’ said Lord Eppington. ‘ I’ve heard of you. A good man, so I’m told. Best fellow at your job Charles could have got.’

Dodds bowed a gratified acknowledgment of this praise.

‘ But why the deuce don’t you fetch Charles back again ? ’ said Lord Eppington. ‘ That’s your business, isn’t it ? to produce the candidate. What’s the good of having a candidate if you don’t produce him ? ’

‘ That’s just what we’re trying to do,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ So exciting, you know. So positively thrill-

ing. Searching after clues and things. You can't think how jolly it is. Just like being a policeman, only far cleverer than the police, poor dears. So stupid, aren't they? But then it would be so awkward for nearly everybody if they weren't. It just shows that things really are rather well arranged in spite of what the Socialists say.'

'We were examining Mr. Beauchamp's cheque-book,' said Dodds. 'When you came in we had just discovered an entry which rather puzzled us.'

'If Charles has forged a cheque,' said Lord Eppington, 'I've done with him. I say done with him. Do you hear that, Edith, done with him. Bolting with other fellows' wives is bad enough. Not a thing Charles ought to do in the middle of an election. And killing the other candidate isn't what's done in this country. Nasty un-English way of conducting an election. Only dagoes do it. But forging cheques is an entirely different matter. I'll pay up, of course. Rather than see my son-in-law go to prison as a forger I'll pay up. But I won't have anything more to do with Charles. Can't have a man drinking my port and potting my pheasants who's forged a cheque. How much is it?'

'Darling,' said Lady Edith, 'don't be so impulsive. Your sciatica will be worse to-morrow if you go on like this.'

'I assure you, my lord,' said Dodds, 'there's no suggestion, there never has been the slightest suggestion of Mr. Beauchamp's forging a cheque.'

'I never said he did,' said Lord Eppington. 'Shouldn't dream of accusing Charles of such a thing. Hang it all, Edith, your husband may be a fool about women, but he is a gentleman. Now then,

Dodds—Is it Dodds or Dobbs?—what about this cheque? If Charles didn't forge it, who did?'

'All we know', said Dodds, 'is that a cheque for £500 was cashed on June the seventh, and the amount debited to Mr. Beauchamp's account. That's in his pass-book, but we can't find any corresponding entry among the counterfoils in his cheque-book.'

'Then depend upon it the cheque is a forgery,' said Lord Eppington. 'That fellow Boyd forged it and most likely did away with poor Charles at the same time. I say did away with Charles, and then set going the story about the parson's wife to account for the disappearance. Devilish cunning! But all those Bolsheviks are cunning. Everybody knows that. One comfort is the bank will have to pay up. They won't like it, but they'll have to pay. Banks are always responsible for forged cheques. Dodds, you'd better go up to London and see the manager. Tell him it's a forgery. Start at once. I say at once. We can't have Charles robbed.'

'But, Daddy darling,' said Lady Edith, 'the election. Mr. Dodds has hundreds of letters to answer. So tiresome of Charles being away just now. Not that he'd answer them if he were at home, but it puts all the more work on Mr. Dodds. And he has two meetings to address. And there's a deputation from the landlords of all the public-houses in the constituency. And there's a man who wants something called Proportional Representation and says that he'll vote for Charles if he gets it. So sweet of him, poor dear, though of course one vote isn't very much. Unless he has a wife which will make it two. I don't see how Mr. Dodds can go to London.'

'Never said he could,' said Lord Eppington. 'The

election is the first thing to be considered. Private interests must be postponed to public duty. Always said so. Duty first. I say duty. Nelson, you know. Sound fellow, Nelson. Wish there were more like him. Dodds can't go. Shouldn't. Is it Dodds or Dobbs? I wish you'd tell me once for all, Edith, whether it's Dodds or Dobbs. I hate not knowing a man's name. Deuced insulting to him when I get it wrong. And I never can hear what you young women say nowadays. You all mumble.'

'Dodds,' said Lady Edith, very distinctly. 'Three D's and no B at all.'

'Don't shout at me, Edith. Can't bear being shouted at. I'm not deaf. Dodds must talk to the publicans about Proportional Representation. Sound fellows, publicans. Backbone of the country. If the publicans want Proportional Representation they ought to have it. Never understood what it is myself. But if the publicans want it they ought to have it. After all, there's nothing like beer. I don't drink it myself on account of my sciatica. But I've always said that beer made England what it is. Dodds ought to stay here and drink beer. I quite see that. You'll have to go, Edith.'

'Fraid I can't, Dad. I've promised——'

'Promised? Promised what? Your first duty is to your husband, isn't it? It's your duty to see that he's not robbed. And he will be unless you go and tell the bank manager that that cheque was a forgery. Now don't say that if Charles is murdered it doesn't matter whether he's robbed or not. It matters to his estate. If every Bolshevik is allowed to forge as many cheques as he likes and the bank charges them all up to Charles's account there'll be nothing

left for you and your children. Now don't say you haven't any children. I know that. Can't think what you young women are coming to nowadays. If your mother hadn't had children where would you be? If you don't have any where will they be? That's what I'd like to know. What the deuce is to happen to Charles's money if you won't go up to London and tell the bank manager that that cheque's a forgery—a palpable forgery.'

'But, Dads, do listen for a minute. I've promised——'

'Promised! You promised to love your husband, didn't you? Well, why don't you do it?'

'But I do. I adore Charles, simply adore him.'

'Lady Edith', said Dodds, 'has a most important engagement this evening. She is to address the members of the Ladies' Labour League at Oatlands.'

'I don't approve of women making speeches,' said Lord Eppington. 'Never did. Deuced unlady-like thing. Standing up on a platform with a lot of men shouting at you. Not the sort of thing your poor mother would have done. I'd have forbidden it if she wanted to. I say forbidden it. I'm not the least surprised if Charles has run away with that parson's wife if that's the way you go on, Edith.'

'But, Dad dear, this isn't men. It's women. The Ladies' Labour League.'

'Ladies' Labour League! Ladies! Hussies. I say hussies.'

'The poor dear things', said Lady Edith, 'have been quarrelling dreadfully. So trying for them, though I daresay they really like it. All about timbrels and dances and things like that, in the Psalms, you know,

and whist drives, and I'm going to persuade them to kiss and be friends again. Won't that be nice?'

'It's a magnificent opportunity,' said Dodds. 'Quite unparalleled. It must be the first time that the wife of a Conservative candidate has ever been asked to address a meeting of a Ladies' Labour League.'

'Oh, quite so,' said Lord Eppington. 'I say quite so. *Quite*. If you can persuade them to vote for Charles, then you ought to. I've always said that we oughtn't to spare ourselves or to consider our own feelings when it's a question of getting votes. Not that it's much use asking them to vote for Charles if he's been murdered. Can't vote for a dead man.'

'The very minute Mr. Dodds told me about it', said Lady Edith, 'I telegraphed to Madame Tzaan and told her to make a frock specially for the occasion. I thought perhaps something quite simple, in pale blue, cottagey, if you know what I mean, so that the poor darlings will feel that I'm one of them and just as fond of quarrelling as they are. Such a comfort about Madame Tzaan. You don't have to plan everything out. All you need do is give her a hint of the effect you want, and she does all the rest. Of course the poor sweet hardly knows any English and very little French, which makes it difficult. Still, I expect she'll understand. I telegraphed: "Quelque chose en rapport avec un grève à bras croisés, une robe prolétarienne." She's to send it down by a special messenger and I know it'll be all right. Such a comfort. The poor darling quarrelsome things will fall for it at once.'

'Quite so,' said Lord Eppington, 'quite so. Devilish clever dressmaker that woman of yours must be. Wish my tailor was like her. Don't believe he could

turn me out like a Bolshevik even if I telegraphed to him in Russian. Wouldn't know how. That's what's the matter with half the tradesmen in England now. They don't know How. I say How. How.'

Here it occurred to Dodds that some account of the position of the Oatlands Ladies' Labour League might be interesting to Lord Eppington.

'Boyd, the Labour candidate,' he said, 'promised to address them and then failed. Simply didn't turn up. Never sent them an apology or an excuse or anything. Their idea in asking Lady Edith was to score off him.'

'Thoroughly sound thing to do,' said Lord Eppington. 'Good old spirit of independence which has made England what it is. And of course you've got to do it, Edith. I quite see that. All the same, somebody'll have to see about that cheque. It won't do. It simply will not do to allow the bank to debit Charles's account with every cheque which that scoundrel Boyd chooses to forge.'

'Perhaps, my lord,' said Dodds, 'if you could manage the journey to London yourself——'

He felt that the conduct of the election would be less appallingly difficult if Lord Eppington were either back again in bed or in London pursuing a forger. Besides, the earl was a man of immense energy. He might perhaps find out what had happened to Charles Beauchamp.

Lady Edith supported Dodds.

'If you only could, Dads darling,' she said. 'You'd do it so much better than any one else. But then there's your sciatica.'

'Damn my sciatica!' said Lord Eppington. 'When the interests of the country are at stake and forgers

are playing fast and loose with the rights of property, a man in my position can't have sciatica. The doctors may say what they like, but duty comes first. If it's a choice between sciatica and duty, then sciatica must go to the wall. All the same, Edith, I must say it's deuced inconsiderate of you and Charles to spring this sort of thing on a man of my age, especially when I was safe in bed and wanted to stay there. I haven't had a fortnight in bed for the last two years, what between the shooting and the hunting and the House of Lords I can't get the time, simply can't get it. And now, when I've got it, you and Charles send me off to London chasing after a forger and a parson's runaway wife and searching about in morgues and places for the corpse of an agitator that Charles has taken it into his head to shoot.'

CHAPTER XIX

MR. PEMBERTON, the manager of the Park Lane Branch of the City and Suburban Bank, was in his private office opening the letters which had arrived by the morning post. He came on one from Lord Eppington.

It happened that Lord Eppington banked at the City and Suburban and kept his account at the Park Lane Branch. It was an important account, for Lord Eppington, like his son-in-law, Charles Beauchamp, was a rich man. He was also an earl, and though we all profess to despise titles in these democratic times it is certain that we all greatly respect the men who have them and are ready to do far more for them than we would for mere commoners.

Mr. Pemberton read the letter. Then he stepped into the outer office and called :

‘Mr. Wicks, can you come into my room for a moment. There’s a little matter I want to speak to you about.’

The doors of the bank were not yet open to the public. Mr. Wicks, the head cashier, was busy getting ready for the day’s work, but he obeyed the manager’s summons promptly. Cashiers are always prompt in obeying the summonses of the managers, even if their cash is quite right and they have nothing on their consciences.

‘I have a letter from Lord Eppington,’ said Mr. Pemberton. ‘He’s in a fuss about some cheque which has been debited to Mr. Charles Beauchamp’s account.’

‘Lord Eppington is always in a fuss about something,’ said Mr. Wicks.

He had been for many years in the service of the bank and from time to time had come across Lord Eppington.

‘Quite so,’ said Mr. Pemberton, ‘and Charles Beauchamp’s cheques are no business of his. At the same time——’

He said no more and there was no need to. Mr. Wicks knew exactly what he meant. Lord Eppington was an earl. Lord Eppington was a rich man. Lord Eppington kept his account in the City and Suburban Bank. He must be treated with some respect.

‘What cheque is it?’ said Mr. Wicks.

‘A cheque for £500. It was charged against Beauchamp’s account on June the seventh. Lord Eppington says it’s a forgery.’

‘It isn’t,’ said Wicks positively.

‘You’re quite sure, I suppose.’

‘I’m as sure as I can be about anything. I remember the business perfectly. Mr. Beauchamp came into the bank and asked for a cheque. He said he’d forgotten to bring his cheque-book. He filled it in and signed it on the counter before my eyes and handed it back to me. It was for £500 and he took the whole of it in ten-pound notes. I have the numbers all right.’

‘Thank you,’ said Pemberton. ‘That’s all I wanted to know.’

‘What will you say to Lord Eppington?’

‘There’s only one thing I can say to him. I’ll tell him I can’t give him any information about that cheque or any other except his own. If Mr. Beauchamp thinks it’s a forgery——’

‘It isn’t. It can’t be.’

‘Whether it is or not, Mr. Beauchamp must see me about it himself if he wants to raise the question.’

‘Mr. Beauchamp isn’t likely to do that,’ said Wicks.

Pemberton looked sharply at him. There was something in the way he spoke which suggested that he knew a good deal more about Mr. Beauchamp and his affairs than he had yet told.

‘What do you mean by that?’ said Pemberton.

‘I don’t want to repeat silly stories,’ said Wicks, ‘which may have nothing in them, but I had a letter from an aunt of mine yesterday, an old lady who lives down in the west in a place called Nether Pemberton. She spends her life bossing the Women’s Institute and that sort of thing. She says that Mr. Beauchamp has eloped with her vicar’s wife.’

‘Your aunt had better be careful, and so had you, Wicks. If you take my advice you’ll burn that letter and say nothing about it to any one else. The law of libel is a nasty thing to come up against, and the bank won’t stand one of its officials being mixed up with a scandal.’

Wicks went back to his work. He had been snubbed, but he still believed that there was something, something curious and exciting behind the gossip in his aunt’s letter. He appealed to a subordinate.

‘Twisden,’ he said, ‘do you remember the morning that Mr. Charles Beauchamp came in here and cashed a cheque for £500?’

'Took it all in tenners, didn't he?'

'Did you notice anything odd about him?'

'He looked as if he had slept in his clothes,' said Twisden, who was an observant young man.

'Ah!' said Wicks. 'I got that impression too.'

Charles Beauchamp's clothes, after exposure to a thunderstorm and an early morning climbing in and out of a lorry, were noticeably dilapidated.

'And the man who was with him', said Twisden, 'looked as if he had been making a night of it.'

'Tall fellow, wasn't he? Did you know him?'

'I never saw him before,' said Twisden, 'but of course I knew Beauchamp all right.'

'He didn't strike me as exactly the kind of fellow you'd expect Beauchamp to be going about with. Not quite out of the top drawer, was he?'

Twisden shrugged his shoulders. He was not inclined to speculate about the social position of Charles Beauchamp's companion. It is difficult to be sure of anything of the sort in the case of a man who had been making a night of it and whose clothes showed the effects of his debauch. But Twisden had something more to say.

'Some of those notes came back to us yesterday,' he said. 'Over a hundred pounds worth, lodged in the ordinary course by Fortnum and Mason. Looks rather as if the gay Charles Beauchamp had been going it on *pâté de foi gras*.'

'*Pâté de foie gras* isn't the only thing Fortnum and Mason sell,' said Wicks.

'Well, tinned soup and boiled ham.'

'Fortnum and Mason', said Wicks, 'have a department for ladies' clothes. You could buy a whole trousseau there if you wanted to.'

Twisden pondered the hint for awhile. Then he winked at Wicks.

‘Bit of a dog, Charles Beauchamp,’ he said. ‘Married man too, isn’t he?’

It was half-past ten when Lord Eppington arrived at the bank and was shown straight into the manager’s room.

‘You had my letter, Mr. Lambton,’ he said.

‘Pemberton,’ said the manager, ‘not Lambton. Yes. I have your letter here.’

‘Pemberton,’ said Lord Eppington, ‘Pemberton. Hate getting men’s names wrong. Always most particular about men’s names. It’s so insulting to them when I get them wrong. But what the deuce am I to do if you won’t write legibly. I’ve had dozens of letters from you. I say dozens. Hundreds. Signature always looked like Lambton, not Pemberton. It’s not my fault if you don’t write legibly. Why don’t you write legibly? A man ought to be able to write his own name. Here we are spending millions on education and a man like you can’t write his own name. How am I to know you mean Lambton if you write Pemberton? I always thought it was Pemberton.’

‘It is,’ said the manager.

‘Then why did you say just now that it was Lambton? I don’t mind being corrected, not in the least. If I’m wrong I like to be corrected. But why the deuce correct me when I’m right? Now which is it? Pemberton or Lambton? Let’s get that settled clearly before we go any further. Is it Pemberton or Lambton?’

‘Pemberton,’ said the manager.

‘Very well. I’m quite satisfied. Quite satisfied if

you'll stick to it. But don't go chopping and changing. It's not fair to me. It's devilish inconsiderate when I'm trying to get your name right. How the deuce can I be expected to get it right if you say Lambton one day and Pemberton the next, and sign your letters in a way that would make anybody think you meant Frampton. Now what about this cheque of my son-in-law, Charles Beauchamp's ?

'I'm afraid I can't give you any information about that, Lord Eppington.'

'What do you mean, no information? I'm not asking for information. I'm giving you information. I say giving. Giving. Not asking, giving. That cheque's a forgery and the bank will have to pay up. Five hundred pounds. Can't have my son-in-law robbed of five hundred pounds by some scoundrelly forger. Bolshevik, I expect. All those fellows are forgers.'

'The bank is, of course, responsible for the money', said Mr. Pemberton, 'if the cheque is a forgery.'

'If,' said Lord Eppington. 'There's no "if" about it. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Frampton——'

'Pemberton,' said the manager.

'Very well,' said Lord Eppington. 'I don't mind. I'm only trying to get it right. But it's deuced difficult for me when you will keep chopping and changing. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Lambton, or your clerk. Did you tell me your clerk's name? Pemberton, wasn't it? Or Frampton? I'm not blaming you or Mr. Pemberton. These Bolsheviks are infernally cunning. I say cunning. They'd take in any one. All I want to be sure about is that the bank pays up. Can't have Charles robbed.'

‘If there’s any question of a forgery,’ said Mr. Pemberton, ‘Mr. Beauchamp must communicate with me himself. You must understand, Lord Eppington, that I cannot discuss Mr. Beauchamp’s bank account or his cheques with any one except Mr. Beauchamp himself.’

‘And how the deuce—I say, the deuce—How the deuce is Charles to call on you, or write to you, by gad, or communicate with you in any way, when he’s dead. I say dead.’

‘Dead! I hadn’t heard. I—I——’

‘Murdered,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Murdered by the same scoundrel who forged the cheque. Fellow called Boyd. Socialist. Dangerous agitator. Ought to be shot. If Charles has shot him it’s a damned good thing. Though I don’t think he ought to have done it. It’s not a thing that a man in Charles’s position ought to do.’

‘But’, said Mr. Pemberton, who was beginning to feel a little confused, ‘if Mr. Beauchamp has been murdered——’

‘Never said he had,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘I said he’d shot the scoundrel who forged his name to a cheque for £500, and quite right too, in my opinion.’

‘It seems to me’, said Mr. Pemberton, ‘that this is a matter for the police. My advice to you, Lord Eppington, is to put it into the hands of Scotland Yard at once. I can promise that the moment the police begin to make inquiries we shall give them the fullest information in our power. In fact, if you assure me that you are going to the police at once I shall stretch a point and tell you——’

‘The police!’ said Lord Eppington. ‘I don’t know

how you feel about it, Mr. Pennington. I say feel about it. Feel. But I've the greatest objection to washing dirty linen in public, family linen. Deuced disagreeable thing, family linen. Ought not to be washed at all, in my opinion.'

'But surely in a case of murder——'

'Never said murder,' said Lord Eppington. 'I said dirty family linen, and that's what it is. How am I to go to the police and say that my son-in-law has run away with a parson's wife? I say how? How? No affair for the police if he has. It will simply create a scandal if I go to the police to complain about my son-in-law bolting with a parson's wife. I don't altogether blame Charles, mind you? The way Lady Edith's going on—making speeches on platforms, offering to kiss miners—— Saw it in the paper myself. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself. She offered to kiss a whole lot of miners. Not the sort of thing a woman in her position ought to do. We can't blame Charles for bolting, though he shouldn't have done it in the middle of an election. Devilish bad impression that kind of thing produces, especially when it's a parson's wife. But it's not a matter for the police. I have to consider my daughter's feelings. I don't know whether you have a daughter, Mr. Uppington.'

'Two,' said Pemberton.

'Then you ought to understand,' said Lord Eppington, 'I say understand. Understand my position. If your two daughters had run away with parsons, left their husbands and bolted with parsons, would you go to the police about it?'

'Lord Eppington,' said Pemberton, 'if you won't go to the police, will you go and consult your own

lawyer? I really don't understand this business well enough to advise you.'

'Not the slightest necessity for you to understand anything', said Lord Eppington, 'except that the bank has to pay up that £500. Can't have Charles robbed. If you've paid out money on a forged cheque, that's your affair. I say your affair. You're responsible.'

The interview had been a trying one for Mr. Pemberton. He had kept his temper under severe pressure. He had kept his head, though much that he heard was most confusing. He had stuck steadily to the standard of conduct proper to bank officials when questioned about their client's affairs. But there is a limit to human endurance and Mr. Pemberton had reached it. At last he said something which, strictly speaking, he ought not to have said.

'I give you my personal assurance, Lord Eppington, that the cheque for £500 of which you have been speaking was not forged. I ought not to tell you this. I have no right to give you the information. But I think it may simplify things for you if I assure you that that cheque was perfectly in order.'

'Very well,' said Lord Eppington. 'I say very well. If you take up that attitude there's nothing for me to do except wash my hands of the whole business. Ought never to have touched it. Didn't want to. I've got sciatica and I ought to be in bed. A man of my age can't be expected to spend his time chasing forgers and parsons' wives and young women who run away from their husbands. You must look after your own daughters, Mr. Puffington. No affair of mine. None. I'm going home to bed. Had enough of this.'

I say enough. If the country is to be handed over to Socialist agitators I can't help it. I've done my best. One comfort is they can't make me pay over everything I own in death duties till I'm dead. I say dead. Dead.'

CHAPTER XX

MR. PEMBERTON, though confused and troubled, was devoted to duty. As soon as Lord Eppington left him he settled down again to his interrupted morning's work. He was not left in peace for very long. A quarter of an hour later Wicks tapped at the door and came into his office.

'I thought you might like to know', he said, 'that another of those notes has turned up. I've just checked the number with my list and it's certainly one of those which I paid out to Mr. Beauchamp.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Pemberton. 'Another of Fortnum and Mason's lodgments?'

'No. This note arrived in a cash remittance from our Holycroft St. Mary branch.'

'From where?'

'Holycroft St. Mary. It's a small mining town and we have a branch there. I've just looked up the place and I find it's in the neighbourhood of Mr. Beauchamp's house.'

Pemberton, though he resented interruption of his morning's work and greatly disliked being drawn into any business which was none of his, was interested in Charles Beauchamp and his ten-pound notes. He thought that sooner or later there would be inquiries from the police and he thought that he ought to have

as much information as possible for them when they came.

‘It looks as if he’d doubled home again,’ he said. ‘If so he can’t be murdered. Lord Eppington seemed to think he had been, but that can’t be so if he’s just got rid of one of the notes in his own neighbourhood.’

‘It might be well to find out something about it,’ said Wicks. ‘We can certainly find out who lodged it in Holycroft St. Mary branch. If you will authorize a trunk call to the manager there I’ll get through to him at once and ask him.’

‘Do,’ said Pemberton. ‘Find out all you can from him about that note. I’m expecting police inquiries and should like to be ready for them.’

‘The police!’

Wicks was thrilled.

‘I strongly advised Lord Eppington to go to the police, or else to his solicitor. I hope he’s done one or the other. Whichever he’s done we shall have Scotland Yard making inquiries. I should be glad if you’d ring up the Holycroft St. Mary manager at once.’

Wicks went off joyfully. This was by far the most exciting thing which had happened during his long years of service in the bank. The mention of the police sent a delightful shudder through him. The suggestion of murder—Pemberton had certainly said the word ‘murder’—made him quiver with pleasurable horror. It was not that Wicks believed that any one had been murdered. The news in his aunt’s letter seemed to him a sufficient explanation of all that was going on. Charles Beauchamp had evidently eloped with the lady of his heart and bought her a supply of clothes before leaving London for—perhaps for

Monte Carlo. Wicks' imagination ran riot among the delights of Monte Carlo. The only thing that troubled him at all was the note which had come back from Holycroft St. Mary. That did not seem to fit in with the rest of the story.

The getting of the call through was a longish business and it was a quarter of an hour before Wicks was back again with Pemberton, ready to make his report.

'The manager of Holycroft St. Mary says that the note in question was paid into the private account of one of the assistant teachers in the primary school, a Miss Benson.'

'A school teacher!' said Pemberton.

'Not a married woman this time, anyway,' said Wicks. 'That's something.'

Wicks was a man who led a perfectly respectable life in a neat little suburban house, kept in order for him by a neat little respectable wife. Both Mr. and Mrs. Wicks believed in respectability, regarding it as the highest achievement, so far, of the human race. But Mr. Wicks, though respectable, believed that he was a man of the world. He grinned knowingly as he spoke, believing that he had a full knowledge of the weaknesses and sins of his fellow men, especially of those wealthy enough to sin fluently. It seemed plain to him, and the same thought occurred to Pemberton, that Charles Beauchamp, on his way to Monte Carlo with the wife of the Nether Pemberton vicar, had found it prudent to send something, a plaster for a broken heart, to an earlier love, now deserted. How else was it possible to account for the possession by a schoolmistress, an assistant and therefore presumably still young, of a ten-pound note drawn out of the bank by Mr. Beauchamp.

‘ I suppose ’, said Wicks, ‘ that he couldn’t very well take them both to Monte Carlo.’

‘ Monte Carlo ! ’ said Pemberton. ‘ What puts Monte Carlo into your head ? Have you any reason to suppose he has gone to Monte Carlo ? Have any other of the notes come in from Cook’s or any other of the tourist agencies ? ’

‘ Oh no.’

‘ Then don’t say Monte Carlo,’ said Pemberton. ‘ Don’t say anything unless you know.’

‘ It seemed to me a likely place,’ said Wicks, ‘ that’s all.’

‘ The police will want facts,’ said Pemberton, ‘ not what you think likely. If Cook’s send in a packet of those notes, that’s another matter.’

Wicks was snubbed for the second time that morning ; but though a snubbing from a manager is usually a serious thing, he scarcely felt it. The subject was so delightfully exciting that no snubbing mattered much.

‘ Beauchamp ’, he said, ‘ seems rather gone on the learned professions. First a parson’s wife, then a schoolmistress. I wonder if there are any more and if he gave each of them a ten-pound note.’

He did a sum in his head rapidly and correctly, as a man does whose daily work keeps him in touch with figures. Charles Beauchamp had paid over a hundred and ten pounds to Fortnum and Mason. That left three hundred and ninety. Deduct two hundred more for current expenses at Monte Carlo and he still had a hundred and ninety left. Ten pounds of this had gone to the Holycroft St. Mary assistant schoolmistress. There were eighteen notes left over, sufficient for eighteen other ladies. With the schoolmistress and

the vicar's wife that made twenty altogether. Even Solomon, had he been living now, might have hesitated to involve himself in so many love affairs at once.

'Hot stuff, Beauchamp!' said Wicks, driven by these considerations to slang quite unsuited to a bank cashier during business hours.

'That will do for the present,' said Pemberton, who did not like the use of words like 'hot stuff' in his private office.

Wicks went back to his work and to a delighted discussion with Twisden. They talked of Miss Benson's morals, a fascinating subject to both of them, for Twisden, though not married, was quite as respectable as Wicks was. Their talk was necessarily interrupted a good deal by unreasonable customers who came in with cheques to cash. They resented these interruptions of their chat, but there came an interruption in the end which was exciting enough to make up for the tiresomeness of all the others.

This was a telephone call from the manager of the Holycroft St. Mary branch of the bank. Wicks listened eagerly to what he had to say.

'That note you were inquiring about just now,' said the manager, 'the one lodged by Miss Benson. Yes, that's it. The police have just been round to ask us if we can trace it. I told them that you had issued it and that if they asked you you'd be ready to tell them who you gave it to. Got that all right?'

'Certainly. We'll tell them.'

'Miss Benson', said the manager, 'got it from a Mrs. Nye—N—Y—E—a miner's wife.'

'Good Lord!' said Wicks. 'Another of them! And a married woman this time.'

'What are you talking about? I can't hear properly. N-Y-E is what I said.'

'Yes, yes. I've got that. What I said was that Beauchamp seems to be going it a bit.'

'Don't understand what you're saying. Oh yes, I can hear you all right, but you seem to me to be talking nonsense. Do you mean Charles Beauchamp the Conservative candidate? He has nothing to do with it.'

'Oh, hasn't he?' said Wicks. 'Just you wait.'

'What I want to get at,' said the Holycroft St. Mary manager, 'what the police want to get at is where Peter Boyd got that note. It was Peter Boyd who sent it to Mrs. Nye. Got that? Yes, the police are quite sure. He sent it in a registered envelope, and dozens of people are prepared to swear that the address is his handwriting. Where did Boyd get it? That's what the police are at. I gather that you paid it out to somebody. Was it to Boyd?'

'No. It wasn't. I paid that note over the counter to Charles Beauchamp on June the seventh at about 11 a.m.'

'Good Lord! And now I hear that Beauchamp has disappeared too.'

'Gone to Monte Carlo,' said Wicks.

'Where's Boyd then?'

'I don't know anything about Boyd? Who is he?'

'Who's Boyd! Who's Big Peter Boyd! I thought every one knew that. He's the Labour candidate for this district and he disappeared about a week ago.'

This was the news which Wicks had for his manager, and he felt justified in going back to the private office from which he had just been dismissed.

'The police', he said excitedly, 'have started their inquiries.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Pemberton, 'uncommonly glad to hear it.'

He was indeed greatly relieved. Since Lord Eppington left him he had been troubled by the thought that he had said too much, that he had been guilty of a grave breach of discipline when he gave his assurance that the cheque was not a forgery. But now it seemed plain that Lord Eppington had taken the advice given him and gone straight to the police. There was, therefore, no harm done. Indeed it might well be that his indiscretion would turn out to have been a help to the cause of justice.

'I shall send them straight to Fortnum and Mason,' said Pemberton.

'Oh, it's not those notes they're inquiring about,' said Wicks. 'It's the note that came from Holycroft St. Mary. It appears that there's another woman mixed up in it, a Mrs. Nye.'

'I wish to goodness', said Pemberton, 'that Beauchamp would pay these ladies of his in half-crowns or coppers or even Treasury notes. It's a nuisance having to trace all his amours.'

'That's just what I thought,' said Wicks, 'but it seems that it wasn't Beauchamp who gave the note to Mrs. Nye.'

'Did he give it to the schoolmistress?'

'No, he didn't,' said Wicks. 'It's all a bit confusing, but it was this second woman, Mrs. Nye, who gave it to the schoolmistress, and Mrs. Nye got it from a man called Boyd.'

'Who on earth is Boyd, and how did he come to have the note?'

'Boyd', said Wicks, 'is the Labour candidate for the Division. The Holycroft St. Mary manager told me so.'

Then Pemberton remembered the name. Lord Eppington had accused Boyd of having forged a cheque and had called him a Bolshevik scoundrel, which was exactly what Lord Eppington would be likely to call a Labour candidate. Now it appeared that Boyd had somehow obtained possession of one of the notes. A horrible fear seized Pemberton. Perhaps Boyd had all the notes.

‘Look here, Wicks,’ he said, ‘are you perfectly sure that Beauchamp wrote and signed that cheque himself. I know you said you were sure, but are you?’

‘I’ll swear it in any court,’ said Wicks. ‘I couldn’t possibly be mistaken.’

‘Then how did Boyd come by that note?’

‘I don’t know. But there was another man with Beauchamp when he asked for the cheque. Twisden saw him too, a big man. Twisden thinks he looked like a labourer.’

‘I wonder——’ said Pemberton. ‘I wonder——’

But what he wondered was so wild and improbable that he did not wish to put it into words. It occurred to him as possible that Boyd, who according to Lord Eppington was a criminal of the most abandoned kind, might be blackmailing Charles Beauchamp. There might be something in the story of the vicar’s wife and Boyd might have got hold of awkward facts. The thing began to take shape in Pemberton’s mind. A bold blackmailer sure of his position, might lead or drive his victim to a bank, watch him writing a cheque and then receive the money as soon as he and his victim were in the street again.

‘I wish to goodness’, he said, ‘that we knew who spent that hundred pounds at Fortnum and Mason’s.’

‘ Shall I ask them ? ’ said Wicks. ‘ I might ask quietly without making any fuss.’

‘ Better not,’ said Pemberton. ‘ We must leave that to the police. But if Lord Eppington hasn’t gone to Scotland Yard—he didn’t say he would, but I hoped he might—if he hasn’t, I think I’ll have to call in the police myself. I don’t like it, Wicks. I don’t like this business at all. What’s known about this fellow Boyd ? ’

‘ Except that he’s the Labour candidate for the Division down there,’ said Wicks, ‘ I know nothing whatever about him.’

‘ Ring up that Holycroft St. Mary man again’, said Pemberton, ‘ and get him to tell you all he knows about Boyd.’

Wicks did as he was told, but unfortunately made his inquiries along wrong lines. Obsessed by his earlier vision of Charles Beauchamp as a reckless lover, he tried to find out whether Boyd also was suspected of illicit flirtations with either Mrs. Nye or the school-mistress. The Holycroft St. Mary manager gave Boyd an excellent character. The Labour candidate, so he said, was such a thoroughly good fellow in every way that it was very difficult to understand how he came to be a candidate at all.

Pemberton, when this was reported to him, had to admit that there was something wrong about his theory of blackmail.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER the disappearance of the two candidates, the Mid-Southeaster election rapidly became a riot of delight for the voters.

Lady Edith attended meetings and made speeches all over the constituency. Her dresses alone would have secured her a warm welcome everywhere. She appeared, and spoke, in evening dress, with or without appropriate hats. She wore and discarded wraps and opera cloaks of the most dazzling kind. She appeared in 'afternoon frocks' and Madame Tzaan's staff had to work overtime to provide the number and variety required. She appeared in tweeds, with thick woollen stockings knitted in squares of red and yellow. Once she appeared in pyjamas, as worn, or supposed to be worn, on the bathing beaches of the Lido. Once she appeared in full hunting kit, actually riding up to the meeting on a horse.

No one could guess beforehand in what attire Lady Edith would address an audience, and her speeches were quite as unexpected as her clothes. There was no subject of the slightest interest to the electors which she was not prepared to tackle at a moment's notice, and no problem for which she had not a solution, usually quite an original solution. Her unquenchable vitality and her charm of manner won her cheers even from those least inclined to vote for her husband. The

voters, men and women, Conservatives and Socialists, enjoyed her thoroughly, and Lady Edith enjoyed them.

Mr. Sims was very happy. He had failed to produce the sensation he expected in the London papers with his story of the disappearance of both candidates. That was a disappointment. But he had made an unexpected success with the runaway lorry. He took the greatest delight in following Lady Edith from place to place, reporting her speeches and describing her dresses. At one time he feared that the number and variety of clothes might be too much for him. His dress vocabulary was limited and he never felt quite sure of the difference between a coatee and a bolero. Materials were entirely beyond him and he got tired of writing 'some soft clinging stuff' or 'some shimmering fabric'. Fortunately he was able to secure help when he most needed it.

He came across Miss Benson, the schoolmistress whose ingenious scheme saved Mrs. Nye's two ten-pound notes from destruction. He found her an attractive person, and she liked what she saw of him. They went about together, Miss Benson on the pillion seat of the motor-cycle, and it was she who provided the public with vivid descriptions of Lady Edith's clothes. Miss Benson was just as happy as Mr. Sims. For the first time in her life she had met a sympathetic and intelligent man, one whom she could think of marrying without the fear that she was condemning herself to a life of intolerable dullness. She had emerged from complete obscurity into the high light of publicity, a very agreeable experience for a young woman of her temperament. Her 'Beauchamp the Bunker' slogan was placarded everywhere, and it was generally known that she had invented it. Her cheque,

the cheque which Nye burned in the brazier, was reproduced in facsimile in the *Wessex Argus*. She thoroughly enjoyed the sense of importance which came to her when she was questioned about the ten-pound note and where she got it.

Nye found a bitter pleasure in asserting that Charles Beauchamp had certainly murdered Peter Boyd. That, so he constantly assured every one, was the treatment which the working man might expect to receive from wealthy capitalists. The arrival of the ten-pound note in an envelope addressed by Peter Boyd made no difference to Nye. He never really believed in the murder, and a proof that the victim was still alive could not be expected to shake a conviction which never existed. It was also a sense of real pleasure to him to feel that he had publicly burned a cheque for twenty pounds, thereby demonstrating his incorruptible contempt for the bribes of capitalists.

Mrs. Nye and little Alfred were both happy. The child had got back his dogs from Hurst's committee-room. He was obliged to keep them concealed in a neighbour's shed when his father was at home, but there were long hours during which his father was in the pit. Then little Alf could enjoy the dogs. Mrs. Nye took the whole of her twenty pounds out of Miss Benson's bank as soon as the burning demonstration was safely over. The pleasure of spending was diminished, though not very much, by the necessity of keeping everything she bought hidden from her husband. She could still display her purchases to admiring and envious neighbours when Nye was at work.

Mr. Priestly, the vicar of Nether Pemberton, found an unexpected pleasure in combating the slander which

assailed his wife. He preached, morning and evening on two successive Sundays, a series of sermons on Envy, Hatred, Malice and Uncharitableness. He did not mention Lady Edith or Dodds by name, but many people hoped he was going to and came to church in the hope of hearing him do it. Mr. Priestly had spent a useful and blameless life in doing duties which brought him little praise and no fame. He suddenly found himself, through no merit of his own, a public character, much pitied, much talked of, often talked to by Mr. Sims and others, who had pencils and notebooks in their hands. A photograph of his vicarage was published in the *Wessex Argus* and Mr. Priestly began to hope that he might be promoted to some post of honour, if not of emolument. He might, for instance, be elected secretary of the Clerical Association to which he belonged. All this added interest and therefore joy to his life.

Mrs. Priestly hurried home from the bedside of her aunt in Eastbourne. She openly and unashamedly enjoyed her new reputation.

'Just fancy,' she said to every one she met, 'poor little me! As if I'd do such a thing! Though, of course, Mr. Beauchamp is a very charming man, very. And so good-looking. But not *that* kind of man, really not at all. And even if he was, I should never dream of——'

Then she used to blush, looking very pretty while she blushed, quite pretty enough to justify the suspicions of Mr. Wicks' aunt.

In the whole constituency there were only two men who did not enjoy the unexpected progress of the election campaign.

Mr. Dodds was worried. Lady Edith was no doubt

winning popularity and perhaps votes for the Conservative cause. But what use was that if there was no Conservative candidate to vote for. The nomination day was drawing near, and unless Charles Beauchamp could be found—and Charles Beauchamp could not be found. Dead or alive there was no trace of him.

Lady Edith made the most reckless promises. Dodds was too experienced an election agent to be troubled about any ordinary promise made by a candidate. He knew that amazing things must be promised if votes are to be secured. But Lady Edith went dangerously far. She pledged Charles Beauchamp to introduce a Bill to establish a universal six-hours working day. She promised, in Charles Beauchamp's name, to do away with income tax altogether, substituting state lotteries to provide the necessary revenue. She promised old age pensions at fifty and the levying of a prohibitive duty on all imported food-stuffs. She promised several other things, in fact promised anything which any one thought desirable. Dodds became acutely uneasy, not because he knew that these promises could not be kept. That is true of all political promises. What made him unhappy was the thought that some rumour of Lady Edith's promises might reach Conservative headquarters, and that the Chief Whip, or some one else in high position, might refuse the support of official recognition to so reckless a candidate.

But Dodds' chief fear was that Lady Edith was practising kinds of bribery which the law regards as undesirable. In this matter of bribery in elections the law is peculiar. A candidate may promise almost anything to any section of his constituents. That is perfectly innocent and right. But if he attempts to

fulfil his promises then and there, he is guilty of a crime which may invalidate his election.

Lady Edith was entirely contemptuous of the law. Instead of promising things and not giving them, she gave things without going through the formality of promising them.

There was, for instance, the case of the Ladies' Labour League in Oatlands in which the greatest harmony prevailed after Lady Edith's visit. After her address she had handed round all the strings of beads which she was wearing round her own neck. These were the Woolworth beads which Miss Peterson had bought for the pit-head meeting at Holycroft St. Mary. Lady Edith had got very tired of them. The women in Oatlands had never seen them before, and fortunately there were enough of them to provide a necklace for each member of the committee, with one over, so that the secretary got two.

Dodds warned Lady Edith of the danger of such gifts, but his warning was wasted. Mrs. Muggridge of Pell Magna received a splendid layette for her expected baby. There was little doubt that Lady Edith sent it to her.

There was the case of Mrs. Nye's twenty pounds and the two dogs for little Alf.

There was an occasion when an importunate widow, at one of Lady Edith's meetings, complained about the insufficiency of her pension. Instead of promising to have it increased if the Conservatives were returned to power—the proper and legal thing to do—Lady Edith jumped down into the body of the hall, took the woman by the arm and led her up to the platform. Then she took off her own coat, a long garment lined with silk, and put it on the widow.

‘ There now,’ she said, turning to the audience, ‘ doesn’t she look a perfect sweet ? ’

The audience thought so and cheered.

‘ You darling,’ she said to the woman, ‘ it’s just your colour. You ought always to wear just that shade of brown to go with your eyes. Such lovely eyes ! ’

The widow, feeling the texture of the material between her finger and thumb, smiled gratefully and stopped making a fuss about her pension.

It was things like these, and there were plenty more of them, which caused Dodds the acutest anxiety. There was no doubt that Lady Edith was becoming popular all over the constituency, so popular that a Conservative victory seemed very likely. That was all to the good, but Dodds was quite sure that if anybody protested afterwards the Conservative candidate could be immediately unseated. His only hope lay in the fact that since Boyd disappeared there was no Labour candidate and therefore—even Dodds was uncertain about the law on this point—it would be difficult to petition in the case of an uncontested election.

The other person, the only other person, who was unhappy, was Comrade Hurst. He watched Lady Edith’s campaign at first with contempt, then with anger and at last with horror when it became clear to him that even convinced supporters of the Labour Party were crowding to her meetings and cheering her when she spoke. He was still convinced that Boyd, if only he were there, could break the spell Lady Edith was casting over the electors. But no one except Boyd could do it. And there was no news of him. None.

Comrade Hurst appealed to the police again and

again. Again and again he was baffled by the solid common sense of Sergeant Mole.

'There's sixty-five thousand, seven hundred and twenty-three people who disappear in London every year,' said Sergeant Mole. Since Comrade Hurst took to worrying him, he had gone into these statistics carefully, 'and sixty-five thousand, six hundred of them turn up again of their own accord. The other hundred or so have very good reasons for staying away. For the rest of the country', he added thoughtfully, 'you might double the figures, but the proportions would be about the same. You take my word for it, Mr. Hurst, Boyd's all right and you'll see him as soon as it suits him to be seen.'

'Do you think', said Hurst, 'that I'd be safe in arranging for a public funeral?'

His one desire was to win back the faithless voters of the mining area, and a funeral, properly organized, has a great effect on the public mind.

'You can't have a funeral', said Sergeant Mole, 'without a death certificate applying to the corpse. And you must get it either from a doctor or the Coroner. I don't see how you can expect them to give you one when there isn't a corpse.'

Comrade Hurst, baffled and defeated by Sergeant Mole, appealed to Inspector Lathom, going all the way to Winstock to see that officer. The Inspector was quite as discouraging as the sergeant had been.

'I don't see', he said, 'how the police can act. If there were a deserted wife who sued for maintenance we might do something. But Boyd wasn't married. If there were any reasonable suggestion of a crime we should act at once. But there isn't. Even if Boyd

owed a lot of money and it was represented that he was running away from his creditors——'

'Boyd didn't owe a penny,' said Hurst sadly.

'The fact is', said the inspector, 'that a grown-up man with no one dependent on him has a perfect right to walk off if he chooses. There's no law compelling a man to stay in one place or to leave his address behind him if he moves. The police can't interfere.'

'But if he's been murdered,' said Hurst desperately.

'Come now, come now,' said the inspector. 'You know as well as I do that he hasn't been murdered. How could he be murdered when Mrs. Nye got a letter from him two days after he went away?'

'There was no letter, only an envelope.'

But this, as Hurst knew very well, was a feeble thing to say. The envelope was just as good as a letter, for it was addressed by Boyd. His handwriting was unmistakable, and perfectly well-known to dozens of people in Holycroft St. Mary.

'He couldn't have addressed the envelope if he was dead,' said Inspector Lathom conclusively, 'and if he'd been murdered he would be dead. I'd have thought you'd have seen that for yourself, Mr. Hurst.'

Hurst did see that only too plainly, but he also saw that Lady Edith's appeal to the voters was a triumphant success. She was advancing the Conservative cause day by day and he saw nothing before him except a humiliating defeat of the Labour candidate. He appealed at last to the Chief Constable.

The Chief Constable, like his subordinate officers, saw no reason why the police should pursue a man who had done nothing wrong. But the Chief Constable was influenced by a consideration which did not affect Inspector Lathom or Sergeant Mole. He realized

that Boyd was something more than a private citizen. He was the Labour candidate for a large division. It would be most unpleasant and very injurious to the reputation of the police if it was said afterwards that he refused to listen to the complaints made by the Labour Party about the disappearance of their candidate. The police must maintain an attitude of complete impartiality. A refusal to look for Boyd might easily be misrepresented. It might be said that it was because he was a Labour candidate that the police refused to find him.

The Chief Constable very much wished that the Conservatives would ask him to seek for their candidate too. Then he could comfortably refuse both requests and remain undeniably impartial. But Lady Edith seemed quite satisfied that her husband should vanish, and Dodds made no appeal to the police.

The Chief Constable, very reluctantly, ordered an investigation of Boyd's disappearance. There was only one clue to work with, the ten-pound note which he had sent to Mrs. Nye. The police took steps to find where that note came from.

CHAPTER XXII

‘THIS business’, said Inspector Lathom, ‘is becoming a nuisance. I wish to goodness the Chief Constable would let it alone.’

‘There’s nothing in it,’ said Mole with comfortable assurance. ‘Boyd’s all right, and the Chief Constable will only look like a fool if we find him.’

‘We’ve got to do it though,’ said Lathom. ‘The Chief Constable is determined about that.’

‘Politics,’ said Mole. ‘Politics as usual. He’s afraid of what the Labour people will say if we don’t get on Boyd’s tracks.’

‘We’ve nothing to go upon except the ten-pound note.’

‘It’s lucky we’ve got that,’ said Mole. ‘We can trace it anyhow. Though I don’t expect it will lead us anywhere in particular. Boyd didn’t steal it, you know.’

There was no difficulty whatever about tracing the note from the Holycroft St. Mary bank to the Park Lane branch which had paid it out. Mr. Pemberton, when approached, was quite ready to give all the information he was asked for, and a good deal more. It was this extra, unsolicited information which set Inspector Lathom and Sergeant Mole thinking.

‘Fifty ten-pound notes,’ so Pemberton said, had been handed across the counter to Mr. Charles Beau-

champ in return for a cheque written and signed in the presence of the bank cashier. One of the notes had at once, that very day apparently, passed into the possession of Peter Boyd. How and why?

'Peter Boyd didn't steal it,' said Sergeant Mole, firm in his faith that Boyd's honesty was beyond suspicion.

'We know what happened to another eleven of the notes,' said Pemberton.

'If you do,' said Lathom, 'you'd better tell us.'

Mr. Pemberton did.

'I wonder', said Lathom, 'if Fortnum and Mason would remember how they got those notes.'

'We can ask if you like,' said Sergeant Mole.

'In the meanwhile', said Lathom to Pemberton, 'you'd better give me a list of the numbers of all the rest of the notes. We'll send it round to the banks in the usual way, and you must let us know, Mr. Pemberton, if any more of them come your way.'

Pemberton promised to do this, promised to do anything in his power to further the ends of justice. He did more than promise. He made a suggestion which he thought might be helpful.

'Could it be a case of blackmail?' he said. 'Could this man Boyd have got a hold of any secret of Beauchamp's and be forcing him to pay up?'

'Not at all likely,' said Lathom.

'Peter Boyd isn't a blackmailer,' said Sergeant Mole.

'And there's nothing any one could blackmail Charles Beauchamp about,' said Lathom. 'I've known him since he was a boy, and he always ran straight.'

'There might be a woman,' said Pemberton.

But the two policemen were not inclined to listen to him any more. They left the bank and took a cab to Fortnum and Mason's shop in Piccadilly.

Their inquiries there were listened to by a courteous manager who remembered the notes, an unusually large packet of ten-pound notes, with numbers running in a series. He produced the salesman who had received them.

The salesman worked in the provision department and remembered the business perfectly. He even knew the customer who had given him the notes. Mr. Beauchamp had often been in the shop and the salesman recognized him. The order, an unusual one, was for £108 worth of provisions, hams, potted meats, pies, tinned soups—the salesman produced the list. The goods were packed in cases—these were the orders of Mr. Beauchamp—and were sent for later in the day. They were paid for with eleven ten-pound notes and Mr. Beauchamp was given two Treasury notes as change.

'That', said Sergeant Mole, to the inspector, 'knocks the bottom out of the bank manager's blackmail idea. Beauchamp spent the money himself.'

'But what on earth did he buy a hundred pounds worth of ham for? There's no sense in it.'

'It wasn't all ham,' said Sergeant Mole, looking down the salesman's list.

The variety of the food bought was undeniable, but that did not meet Inspector Lathom's difficulty. It was as hard to account for the purchase of a hundred pounds worth of mixed foods as for a hundred pounds worth of ham.

The salesman, an observant and intelligent man, was as anxious to be helpful as Pemberton had been. He too volunteered a little information.

‘There was a gentleman with Mr. Beauchamp,’ he said. ‘A tall man, broad-shouldered, might have weighed sixteen stone.’

Being a salesman of provisions he was naturally inclined to estimate the weight of anything he saw, and being a good salesman was very often right.

‘Sounds like Boyd,’ said Sergeant Mole. ‘Had he a red moustache?’

‘Yes,’ said the salesman, ‘and both he and Mr. Beauchamp looked as if they had been in some kind of row, fighting or something of the sort.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ said Lathom. ‘Had either of them a black eye?’

‘It was their clothes made me say that,’ said the salesman, ‘but it might not have been fighting. They might have fallen into a river or something. They were filthy dirty, both of them. I never saw Mr. Beauchamp look like that before.’

The information gathered at Fortnum and Mason’s was interesting, even more interesting than that given by Pemberton.

But it was bewildering. It had the effect of making Lathom a little irritable.

‘I can’t make any sense of the damned thing,’ he said. ‘Why the devil should Beauchamp and Boyd—I suppose it was Boyd—buy all that food?’

‘It looks to me as if they were going off somewhere together,’ said Mole, ‘yachting perhaps.’

‘And swam ashore to get provisions for the cruise,’ said Lathom bitterly. ‘You heard what that man said about their clothes.’

‘Well, both cars were in the river at Murder Bottom.’

‘And they waded about till they came to the canal,’ said Lathom, ‘and then waded the rest of the way up

to London, so as not to leave any footprints or be tracked by bloodhounds? Is that the idea?'

Sergeant Mole chuckled.

'It doesn't sound to me like the sort of thing that either of them would do,' he said. 'I daresay it was just the rain that night which got their clothes into the state that fellow said they were in.'

Next morning there was a little more news for the two policemen. A bank in the neighbourhood of Regent Street reported that three more of the notes inquired for had been lodged by one of their customers. The Imperial Gentlemen's Outfitting Company had passed them in.

Lathom and Mole went together to the large establishment of the Imperial Gentlemen's Outfitters. They were people who did things thoroughly. An Imperial gentleman might have arrived stark naked at their establishment and walked out an hour later, not only clothed from head to foot but equipped with everything that a man in his position could possibly want, from a white waistcoat to a fitted suitcase.

Once more Lathom and Mole were fortunate. After some inquiries, a Mr. Snelgrove was found—'Our Mr. Snelgrove'. He remembered two gentlemen who had entered the shop in a very shabby and dilapidated state and had been led round from one department to another. Under the guidance of Mr. Snelgrove they had bought shirts, socks, collars, ties, boots, hats—indeed everything except gloves and umbrellas, ending by buying two ready-made suits of what Mr. Snelgrove called 'Sportsmen's Tweeds'. There had been some difficulty in getting one of the two gentlemen fitted.

'He took an outsize,' said Mr. Snelgrove. 'He was

tall, over six feet, and had a big chest measurement, a remarkably big chest measurement. But we managed it. In this establishment we undertake to fit any gentleman, whatever his chest measurement.'

Mr. Snelgrove remembered the business as clearly as the salesman in Fortnum and Mason's remembered the purchase of the food.

'The transaction', he said, 'was a little out of the ordinary run. Both gentlemen then and there—in one of our luxuriously appointed dressing-rooms—put on the clothes they had purchased. Their old clothes—and uncommon dirty they were, though one of them was a good suit to start with—were packed up in a suitcase purchased afterwards in our trunk department.'

Mr. Snelgrove made up the bill and was paid with three ten-pound notes, which were afterwards sent to the bank as part of one of the firm's ordinary lodgements.

No. Mr. Snelgrove did not know either of the gentlemen. He did not know their names. The whole affair was a cash transaction, so there was no necessity for them to give their names. But he was able to give a very full description of them. He had, in the daybook of the firm, all their measurements, their size in collars, socks, boots, and hats, the length of their legs, arms, and so forth. He had, besides, helped them to undress and dress again in the luxurious fitting-room, so that there was very little about their bodies which he could not tell. Perhaps never before in their investigations have the police been furnished with such detailed and accurate descriptions of missing men.

After their visit to the Imperial Gentlemen's Out-

fitting Establishment, there was very little doubt left in the minds of Lathom and Mole that Charles Beauchamp and Peter Boyd had gone away together.

Mole clung to the idea that they had gone off yachting. Lathom disagreed with him. Men who go yachting, so he thought, buy white flannel trousers and blue peaked hats. Beauchamp and Boyd had bought 'Sportsmen's Tweeds' and 'Homburg' hats.

'Seems to me', he said, 'more like mountaineering.'

'You couldn't carry all that potted meat up a mountain,' said Sergeant Mole very sensibly.

The banks, once given the task of finding the missing notes, were very efficient. Lathom and Mole were still discussing the clothes bought from the Imperial Gentlemen's Outfitting Company when the news of three more notes reached them. One had been used to pay for dinner at the Euston Hotel. The other two came from the booking-offices at the station.

Inquiries at the Euston Hotel were immediately satisfactory. The head waiter remembered the two gentlemen described to him. They had dined at the Euston Hotel on the evening of June the seventh. The waiter who served them also remembered them. They had eaten the regular table d'hôte dinner and had a bottle of champagne. He remembered the champagne, for they had ordered a bottle of Bollinger '23, a most expensive wine. He thought they had ordered it for a special purpose. At all events they had drunk two toasts. The waiter had not heard the words of the first toast, but he thought they were drinking success to some enterprise. The next toast he distinctly heard and it was this which had fixed the whole incident in his memory. The drinking of toasts of any sort at a table d'hôte dinner at the Euston Hotel is

unusual. The drinking of this particular toast was without precedent.

The shorter of the two gentlemen, the one who in the end paid for the dinner with the ten-pound note, stood up and gave the toast with a certain ceremonious solemnity.

‘To hell with politics!’

The taller gentleman—he was broad as well as tall and had a red moustache—filled his glass, emptying the bottle to do so. Then he too stood up.

‘And to hell with the Labour Party!’ he said.

After dinner, so the waiter reported, they each had a glass of port. No doubt it soothed them after the excitement of such toasts. They paid their bill and left the dining-room. They left it just about the time at which travellers usually leave it who intend to catch the Irish mail.

‘Well,’ said Sergeant Mole, ‘if they wanted to damn politics in our part of the country they could hardly have gone a better way about it. Beauchamp’s wife——’

‘She’s playing old Harry with the constituency,’ said Lathom, ‘there’s no doubt about that.’

The clerk at the booking-office was not so helpful as the waiter. The tendering of ten-pound notes by travellers in long-distance trains was no uncommon experience with him, but he suggested that two gentlemen who had drunk expensive champagne at dinner—he was told about this in the hope of exciting his interest—would be likely to take berths in the Pullman sleeping-car. The tickets for these cars are issued at a special office and the travellers who buy them are asked to give their names. This simplified things greatly. There was no need to trust to the

memory of the clerk in that office. He turned up his books and found that two sleeping-berths had been engaged on the night of the seventh by Mr. C. Beauchamp.

'They didn't take much trouble to cover their tracks here,' said Lathom. 'I should have thought that Beauchamp would have given some other name—Smith or something.'

'I don't suppose', said Mole, 'that it ever entered his head that they could be traced to Euston. They got away from home neatly enough, didn't leave a track. They must have thought they were safe when they got to London. I expect they forgot all about the notes and the way the banks have of keeping a record of the numbers of them.'

There was only one thing more to discover: the actual destination of the fugitives. Here the two policemen were particularly fortunate.

It happened that the sleeping-car attendant who travelled in the Irish mail on the seventh was in Euston station making up his car for a new journey. He remembered the two gentlemen perfectly well. They had only one suit-case between them, an unusual thing. Just before the train started the shorter of the two called a porter and sent him off, hurriedly, to buy a tooth-brush. Travellers in sleeping-cars sometimes discover that they have forgotten to bring their tooth-brushes and buy them at the station. But this particular purchase was impressed on the attendant's memory.

'Just before he sent for the porter', he said, 'the gentleman called to his friend and said they had no tooth-brushes, "I'm sending for one for myself," says he. "Shall I get one for you too?"'

The other gentleman, it appeared, had given a very peculiar answer.

‘I’ll be just as happy’, he said, ‘if I never see a tooth-brush again.’

‘And that’, said the attendant, ‘is how I come to remember them so well, and all about them. I can tell you where they went, if you like. At least I can tell you where they were booked to, for they gave me their tickets before they started. They were booked through to Ballymoy.’

Inspector Lathom made a note of the name.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘that’s that. And there’s no more we can do. There’s nothing to arrest either of them for. We’ll tell Hurst and that will be the end of it unless the Chief Constable wants to tell the Irish police to keep an eye on them.’

‘It seems to me’, said Sergeant Mole, ‘that we ought to tell Lady Edith Beauchamp too.’

CHAPTER XXIII

LORD EPPINGTON lay in bed, very comfortably.

Behind his head was a pile of pillows, so arranged that he was kept in a half-sitting position, very convenient for reading. Across the bed was stretched a reading-stand, an elaborately jointed affair which only Lord Eppington himself thoroughly understood. It could be raised to any moderate height, its long arm stretched into almost any position and the book-rest itself could be set at any angle. Its four claw feet were so heavily weighted that there was not the smallest risk of its tipping over, however much it was pushed or pulled. On the book-rest was a book which Lord Eppington was reading, the latest and most ingenious work of a famous writer of detective fiction.

Near the bed, within reach of Lord Eppington's hand, was a table. On it were six more detective novels, all quite new, a decanter and a wine-glass. The decanter, a survival of the luncheon tray which had been taken away, contained sherry, that best of all sherries known as Bristol Cream.

The house was perfectly quiet. No housemaid ventured to sweep stairs or passages while Lord Eppington was in bed. The use of gramophone or wireless loud-speaker in the servants' hall was strictly forbidden, though it is almost impossible to suppose

that their sounds could reach Lord Eppington's bedroom. Gardeners outside were not allowed to mow grass or push wheelbarrows anywhere near the window of Lord Eppington's room. The manservant who waited on him wore felt slippers.

Lord Eppington was almost completely happy and had every hope of remaining happy for at least a week.

He was disappointed. Lady Edith burst impulsively into his room.

She was flushed and evidently excited. She left the door open. She pushed a chair aside noisily. She completely destroyed the atmosphere of peace.

'Daddy darling,' she said, 'I am so sorry for your sciatica, but I must tell you about Charles.'

'Shut the door, Edith,' said Lord Eppington, 'and sit down. Can't have you tramping about my room; bad for my sciatica to have a woman trampling about. You might as well be a nurse. Detestable thing, a nurse. A nurse ramps. I say ramps. Rattles tooth-glasses and pokes fires. Sit down.'

Lady Edith shut the door, but she did not sit down at once. She went over to the dressing-table, took a powder-puff out of her bag and dabbed her nose with it.

'Go away, Edith,' said Lord Eppington. 'I can't have you dressing and undressing in my bedroom. It's not decent.'

'But, Daddy, dearest one, I can't go away till I've told you about Charles and asked your advice. The police have been to me. So thrilling. Made me feel as if I was a real criminal. I always think it would be so exciting to be a criminal. But of course it wasn't that. It never is, is it? So disappointing.'

'Sit down, Edith, and try to be coherent. I say

coherent. How the deuce do you expect me to get rid of my sciatica if you won't be coherent ? '

Lady Edith sat down on the end of her father's bed, disturbing the poise of the reading-stand as she did so.

' It was only about that cheque of Charles's they came,' she said. ' Still, rather thrilling when it is the police.'

' The police ! ' said Lord Eppington. ' Glad to hear it. Uncommonly glad to hear it. Hope they've arrested that fellow Puffington. I told him he'd have to pay up. Bank must pay up on a forged cheque. He turned nasty about it. I say nasty. Now the police have arrested him. Good job too. Hope they'll arrest all the directors too. Can't have Charles robbed.'

' But they haven't arrested any one,' said Lady Edith. ' If they do arrest any one it will be Charles.'

' Can't arrest Charles for running away with the parson's wife. Nothing criminal about that. Immoral, not criminal.'

' But Charles hasn't.'

' Never said he had. Never thought he had. Not the sort of thing Charles would do just before an election. I always told you he hadn't, Edith, and I can't think why you go on saying he has.'

' Daddy, my own,' said Lady Edith. ' Do listen to me. The police have found out all about that cheque of Charles's and just what he did with the notes. So wonderful of them. I do think the police are splendid, and if ever I marry again I'll have a policeman.'

' If Charles has been circulating dud cheques,' said Lord Eppington, ' I've done with him, and the sooner you divorce him and marry a policeman the better—

in my opinion—not that you or any one else ever pays any attention to my opinion.'

'The first thing Charles did', said Lady Edith, 'was to spend a hundred pounds on things to eat and drink at Fortnum and Mason's.'

'First-rate firm, Fortnum and Mason,' said Lord Eppington. 'Charles couldn't have gone to better people. Went to them myself the day before yesterday. Man in the club told me they were the proper people for invalid foods. Thought I'd try them for my sciatica. Spent twenty pounds there. Capital fellow Fortnum. Most intelligent. Or it may have been Mason. Can't be sure. Never am sure about names. Most intelligent fellows, anyhow, both of them. I say both. Knew exactly what I wanted. The moment I mentioned sciatica Fortnum knew what was wanted. Charles couldn't have gone to better people. But I didn't know he had sciatica. Why didn't you tell me, Edith? You ought to tell me things like that. So awkward not knowing. I meet a man at the club or somewhere and don't ask after his sciatica. That hurts his feelings nearly as badly as not getting his name right. But how the deuce am I to ask after Charles's sciatica if you won't tell me he has it?'

'But he hasn't. If you'd only listen——'

'Then why did he go to Fortnum and Mason's to buy invalid food? Spent a hundred pounds, you say. I don't know what young men are coming to nowadays. I can't afford to spend a hundred pounds on invalid food.'

'But it wasn't invalid food. It was hams and tongues and game pies and potted meats and tinned soups and all sorts of things like that. Quite the

opposite of invalid food. Most unwholesome. The poor darling will be horribly upset if he eats them all.'

'No business of mine if he is,' said Lord Eppington. 'Can't see why you come here disturbing me in this way just because Charles has a pain in his stomach. Get off my bed, Edith. I won't have you sitting on my bed. Can't move my legs with you sitting there. It's most unpleasant not being able to move your legs when you've got sciatica.'

Lady Edith, after further disturbing the reading-stand, slipped off the bed and took a chair.

'The police are so splendid,' she said. 'They found out all the things Charles bought. So clever of the police. I wonder how they did it. Perhaps Fortnum and Mason told them.'

'Most intelligent fellow, Fortnum,' said Lord Eppington. 'Always said so. And Mason. Mason's a very intelligent fellow too. Which was it, Edith, Fortnum or Mason? So awkward not knowing things like that.'

'The next thing the police found out', said Lady Edith, 'was that Charles bought a ready-made suit of clothes at a shop in Regent Street.'

'Charles shouldn't have done that,' said Lord Eppington. 'Not a thing he ought to do. A man in Charles's position ought to go to a good tailor. Disgusting thing buying second-hand clothes from Jews.'

'Not second-hand, darling, ready-made.'

'Same thing,' said Lord Eppington. 'Don't argue with me, Edith. I may not be a clever man. Never said I was, but I've always gone to a good tailor and I think Charles ought to do the same.'

'He spent three ten-pound notes in that shop,' said

Lady Edith. 'He bought a suit for himself and one for another man who was with him, as well as shirts and things.'

'Shouldn't have done that. I say shouldn't. Should not. What the deuce was the good of dressing the woman up in men's clothes, especially a vicar's wife. Doesn't deceive anybody. It's been tried hundreds of times and it never worked. Charles ought to have known better. Simply draws attention to her. That's all.'

'Daddy, belovedest, that vicar's wife is home again. She didn't go away with Charles at all. I've told you that before.'

'Never said it was a vicar's wife. Doesn't matter what woman it was. Charles shouldn't dress her up in men's clothes. I believe there's a law against it. Whether she's a vicar's wife or not makes no difference. No special laws about vicar's wives. Any woman is the same in the eyes of the law. Mustn't dress them up in men's clothes.'

'But it wasn't a woman at all,' said Lady Edith. 'The police found that out. So frightfully clever of them. And I always used to think the police were rather stupid. They look stupid, poor dears. I suppose it's the uniform, but perhaps it's just part of their cleverness, put on to deceive the criminal. Anyhow, they must be clever, for they found out that the man Charles bought the clothes for was six feet high and had a red moustache. The man in the shop told them so.'

'Fortnum or Mason, which? I say which? So awkward never knowing whether it's Fortnum or Mason.'

'Neither, Dad. It was the man in the clothes-shop.'

'The Jew,' said Lord Eppington. 'Why couldn't you have said so at once? Intelligent people the Jews. I say intelligent. Fortnum might not have known, nor Mason, but a Jew would see it at once that it wasn't a vicar's wife. Glad it wasn't a vicar's wife. I don't like scandals in the church. Never did. So awkward meeting bishops in the House of Lords when your son-in-law has run off with a vicar's wife. Bishops feel that sort of thing and I don't blame them. It's deuced unpleasant for me. How am I to lunch with the Archbishop at the Athenæum when he knows and I know that Charles has run off with a vicar's wife?'

'Another ten-pound note', said Lady Edith, 'was paid at the Euston Hotel. Charles and the man who was with him dined there.'

'Why shouldn't he? Nothing wrong about dining in the Euston Hotel. Can't arrest Charles for that. I've dined at the Euston Hotel myself, going up to Scotland for the twelfth. Very convenient place to dine. Fellow in a red coat carries your bag to the train after dinner. Nice things, fellows in red coats. Always liked fellows in red coats. I used to wear one myself at one time, playing golf. Not the fashion now, but don't see why Charles shouldn't wear one if he likes. But not second-hand. Can't have my son-in-law buying second-hand red coats from Jews in Whitechapel. Man in his position shouldn't do it.'

Lady Edith, no longer deflected by her father's casual reflections on men and things, went on with her tale.

'After dinner Charles bought two tickets, first class with sleepers, on the Irish mail. More notes were traced to the Euston booking-office. So wonderful! I wish Peterson was as clever as the police. They find

ten-pound notes wherever they are, and poor Peterson often spends hours looking for my keys. I wonder if the police would teach her how to do it? Do you think I could send her up to Scotland Yard or somewhere for a course? So good for her, poor dear, and so useful to me afterwards.'

'Don't do that,' said Lord Eppington. 'Deuced inconvenient having a policeman in the house as a regular thing. Never know what he might find out. Might arrest the butler any day. Much better not to arrest the butler. It only leads to trouble. You're expected to appear in Court and give evidence. Detestable thing giving evidence.'

Lady Edith sighed. It might be convenient to have Peterson trained to find keys, but it would be most unpleasant if she arrested Martin. She gave up the idea of the training and went back to the police story of Charles's movements.

'He took the tickets right through to Ballymoy. That's a place in Connaught. So wonderful of the police to know that, isn't it? But perhaps they have maps, or have to pass exams. in geography, poor dears.'

'Ballymoy!' said Lord Eppington. 'There's fishing there. I knew a man once who went there to fish. Didn't know you could fish in Ireland now. Thought they'd killed all the salmon with electricity. Heard something about that I know. Something to do with the Shannon. They shouldn't kill salmon with electricity. Damned unsporting thing to do and doesn't pay in the end. I say in the end.'

'Now, Dad,' said Lady Edith, 'stop talking about salmon and——'

'Wasn't talking about salmon. Never talk about salmon. Haven't talked about salmon for years.'

'I'm just coming to the thrillingest thing of all,' said Lady Edith. 'I saved it up to the last so as to give you a real shock. Who do you think the man is who's gone with Charles?'

'Not Frampton, I hope,' said Lord Eppington. 'Frampton ought to be arrested. Refused to pay up on that cheque and was devilish disagreeable to me. Can't have Frampton going off to fish with Charles.'

'Guess again, Dad.'

'Fortnum', said Lord Eppington, 'or Mason. Shouldn't wonder a bit if Fortnum was a fisherman. Deuced intelligent fellow, Fortnum. He packed me up twenty pounds worth of invalid food. I say food. Not milk puddings and beef tea. That's all I ever get in my own house when I go to bed. No use having sciatica if you can't get anything to eat except milk puddings. Nasty stuff, sago. Fortnum saw that at once. The moment I told him I detested tapioca he saw what I wanted. Said he could do better than that, and did. I say did. If Charles has gone fishing with Fortnum, he's all right.'

'Guess again, Dad. It isn't Fortnum.'

'Never said it was Fortnum. Said Mason all along. Deuced confusing thing fellows having two names. Ought not to be allowd. Fortnum or Mason. I say or. Or. Not both.'

'It's neither, Dad.'

'Can't be the Whitechapel Jew,' said Lord Eppington. 'Fellow he bought the old clothes from. Don't believe Charles would do it. The police may say what they like, but I don't believe it. Charles wouldn't go fishing with a Whitechapel Jew. You shouldn't say things like that about your husband.'

It's not decent. I don't know what young women are coming to nowadays.'

'It's worse than that, Dad. At least you'll say it's worse. The policeman told me—— Such a nice comfortable policeman called Mole. I didn't know anybody could be called Mole, did you? Sounds so like burrowing. And of course he did rather burrow after that cheque of poor Charles's. Perhaps that's why he's called Mole.'

'Can't see what moles have to do with fishing,' said Lord Eppington. 'Worms, perhaps. A White-chapel Jew might use worms. Deuced unsporting way of catching salmon. Charles wouldn't do it. But not moles. You couldn't catch salmon with moles. And anyhow, there aren't any moles in Ireland. St. Patrick and so forth. Always wondered why St. Patrick cleared the country of moles. Harmless things, moles. Don't eat pheasants' eggs or kill partridges. Nothing wrong about moles.'

'It's not that kind of mole, Dad. It's a policeman. He says Charles has gone away with Boyd. Peter Boyd. The Labour candidate, you know.'

'Charles can't have gone away with Boyd. Totally impossible. The police are all wrong about that. Police generally are wrong.'

'They're nearly sure,' said Lady Edith. 'They got a description of the man who was with Charles from the bank clerks and from the salesmen at Fortnum and Mason's and from the man they bought the clothes from and from the waiter at Euston Hotel and the man who had charge of the sleeping-car. They're quite sure it's Boyd.'

'Socialist,' said Lord Eppington. 'Forged Charles's

name to a cheque. Robbed a widow of ten pounds. Disgusting thing to do.'

'He sent Mrs. Nye back the ten pounds,' said Lady Edith, 'and I don't believe he forged the cheque.'

'I must see about this,' said Lord Eppington. 'Must see about it at once. Go away, Edith. I'm going to get up and dress.'

'Dearest one,' said Lady Edith, 'don't do that. Your sciatica may turn to something worse.'

'Can't have my son-in-law kidnapped. I've just been reading a book about a man who was kidnapped. Ought to be reading it still. Would be if you hadn't rushed in here disturbing me. Deuced inconsiderate of you, and Charles. Both of you. The fellow in the book, capital fellow, going to marry a nice girl, was kidnapped by Bolsheviks. Scoundrels. Paid by a Chinaman. That sort of thing is bad enough in books. Much worse when it happens to my son-in-law. All comes of mixing yourself up with White-chapel Jews. What can Charles expect if he does that sort of thing? Gets himself into a nasty mess and expects me to rescue him.'

'I'm sure he doesn't, Dad.'

'Then he ought to. No fellow ought to like being kidnapped. Held up to ransom. Ear cut off to-day. Thumb to-morrow. Sent by post to relatives. Can't have Charles chopped up in that way. Can't have my bedroom littered with bits of Charles packed in cardboard boxes. Nasty smelly things, gone bad in the post. I say smelly. Shall start at once. Rescue Charles.'

'Darlingest,' said Lady Edith, 'I scarcely hoped you would. I can't, you know. I've eight meetings in the next three days. Can't disappoint the poor

darlings. Especially when I've ordered four new dresses. I don't know what Madame Tzaan's bill will be like after this. Appalling! So I can't go, can I? Though I'd love to rescue Charles.'

'Not a woman's job at all. Man's job. My job.'

'And of course I can't spare Dodds. And Sergeant Mole says the police have no *locus standi*. Did he say *locus standi* or was it *tertium quid*? Whichever it was it meant that he wouldn't go.'

'Police no use in these cases. Police never any use when Bolsheviks kidnap people. If you'd read the book I was reading when you came in you'd see——'

'I never read that kind of book,' said Lady Edith. 'Too exciting. If you do go, Dad—I hate to think of your sciatica, but perhaps the change of air will do it good. If you do go, please tell Charles to come back at once. The nomination day—I know he can't be back for that. It's the day after to-morrow. But I wish he'd telegraph to say he's coming. You can't think how I've been bothered about where Charles is. Colonel Enfield called yesterday and sat for hours and that sweet Farmer Tuke came the day before. And all the dear members of the Conservative Committee. Such lambs! And they all say the same thing: "What about Charles's nomination?" So silly of them, of course, but it does worry me, and poor Mr. Dodds is getting pale and thin. I tell them that Charles is all right, but they will keep asking me where he is, especially Colonel Enfield.'

'Enfield! Enfield! I know. Sound fellow Enfield. Lives at Pell Magna. Must ask Enfield to dine and sleep. Used to know Enfield well at one time. Don't wonder he's annoyed about Charles.'

Not nice. I say not nice to have the Conservative candidate sent back to the constituency in bits. Ear to-day. Thumb to-morrow. Annoying for Enfield, very. How is he to know that there'll be anything left of Charles when the polling day comes? You can't expect people to vote for a candidate who's all chopped up. Not fair to ask them. I quite see that. Enfield sees that. But you can tell him, Edith, that I'll put a stop to it at once. Can't have it. Shouldn't be done. Must stop it.'

'Do, Dad, darling. And please bring Charles back with you if you can.'

'Can't do anything till you go away. I told you that all along. I told you that when you first came in. How am I to dress with you sitting there? How am I to shave if you won't tell them to bring me up some hot water? How the deuce am I to go off after Charles if you sit there and won't let my man come in and pack a bag for me?'

Lady Edith, a really affectionate daughter, flung her arms round her father's neck and kissed him heartily.

'Don't do that, Edith,' he said. 'Hate being slobbered over by women. Always did.'

Lady Edith kissed him again.

'If you go on doing that', said Lord Eppington, 'you'll catch sciatica, and serve you right. Surest way to catch anything is to kiss the patient. Nasty, messy thing to do, anyhow. I say messy. Don't do it again, Edith.'

Lady Edith waved a farewell when she reached the door.

'So sweet of you to undertake it,' she said, 'but I expect you'll have rather fun when you get there.'

Sergeant Mole says that Boyd is quite a good sort really and that he's only a Socialist because Charles is a Conservative, and you can't have two men the same in one election. Bless you, Dad.'

CHAPTER XXIV

FAR out westward, on the outermost fringe of the islands of Ballymoy Bay, lies Inishmee, long, low, sickle-shaped. Beyond Inishmee lies the Atlantic, and somewhere in a distance as great to-day to the islanders as it was to Columbus or Cabot, is America. Eastward is the broad stretch of the bay with its hundreds of islands, its racing tides, its rocks and narrow straits. The entrance to the bay is guarded by a line of islands, most of them little more than rocks, some with patches of scanty pasture where a bullock or two grazes in summer time. Only one is fit for human habitation—Inishmee.

The island curves, presenting a humped back to the force of the winter gales and the Atlantic waves which crash on it. It is like a living creature, long battered, which has learned to cower, a frightened thing, to which not even summer suns and sparkling water bring confidence. Along the western, humped back of Inishmee are steep clay cliffs, boulder set, with a fringe of fallen boulders at their bases. The storms set these rolling and crashing, fling them against the bluffs, and detach, year after year, fresh masses of clay, fresh piles of boulders, ever diminishing the surface of the island.

At the eastern side the bent wings enclose a shallow bay. Above the sandy shore, a very little above

high tide mark, are two cottages, whitewashed, thatched, with windows and doors which face eastward. Behind them is a narrow strip of dug land, where potatoes grow. Behind the cottages the land slopes steeply up to the top of the bluff. Here cattle graze, lean pigs gallop about, lines of geese parade in solemn dignity, and ducks seek nourishment when they are tired of swimming in the sea. Beside each cottage is a turf stack, deep brown winter fuel, almost as hard as coal, brought in hookers from the distant bogs of Achill Island, far away to the north.

In one of the cottages lives Mrs. Hegarty, a young woman, but widowed five years ago by the sea which surrounds her home; widowed and bereft, for the same storm which drowned her husband drowned her brother, the inhabitant of the other cottage. Left with two small children, Mrs. Hegarty faced boldly and cheerfully the task of winning a living from the sea and the scanty patch of land, a task not too hard when there are men to work, but very difficult for a woman, however brave.

Half a mile out from the west-facing bluffs of the island, Mrs. Hegarty's boat rolled and staggered in the smooth swell. A brown patched lug sail flapped and filled again as the boat rolled, setting the block of the sheet rattling and the yard creaking as it swung. The boat moved slowly forward, leaving an oily wake, but it was plain that the breeze was dying and that very soon she would move no more.

In the stern, half-sitting, half-lying on the floor boards, his arm hooked over the tiller, sat Charles Beauchamp. His face was burnt brown by sea and sun. The skin on his nose was peeling in fine flakes. One hand was stretched over the gunwale of the

boat and held a fishing-line. After the manner of sea fishers he pulled it slowly forward and let it slip back again, a soothing movement likely in the end to induce sleep or heavy coma if no fish insists on wakefulness by taking the hook and tugging at the line. Amidships, his back to the gunwale, sat Peter Boyd. He too held a line, and his hand made the same sleepy, pendulum-like movements. His legs were stretched straight across the boat, indifferent to the bilge water which washed to and fro with the rolling, wetting now his ankles, now his knees. Between the two men, writhing, slithering, sometimes flapping, were the fish they had caught, a dozen mackerel, three gurnets and a dark green pollock.

The lug sail gave a despairing flap and did not fill again.

'Wind's gone,' said Boyd. 'Bound to go at noon on a day like this.'

He looked up at the sky where the sun shone red through a faint haze. He looked westward where the mist hung in little wreaths over the sluggish water. He looked eastward at the bluffs of Inishmee rising from their boulders.

'Confounded nuisance,' said Beauchamp. 'We'll have to row home.'

But though rowing was inevitable neither man stirred or spoke for awhile.

'My sink's on the bottom,' said Beauchamp.

'We'll lose our hooks if we're not careful,' said Boyd. 'There's no way on the boat.'

They picked up the square frames which lay slimy among the fish, hauled the lines home and wound them up.

Boyd, rising to his knees, let go the halyard and

the lug sail dropped into the boat. He unshipped the stumpy mast and laid it along the thwarts.

Beauchamp looked at the blistered palms of his hands and at the thick, rough oars. Then he smiled a little ruefully.

'I wish my hands were a bit harder,' he said. 'To tell you the truth I'd as soon not have to row.'

'Better than making speeches, anyhow,' said Boyd. 'Better than telling lies all day. I don't set up to be particularly fond of the naked truth; but—— Well one likes to say what one thinks occasionally, and in politics—— But I daresay you didn't have to do quite so much lying as I had.'

'More,' said Beauchamp. 'More. I'm convinced of it. All the same, my hands are in a beastly state.'

'Yesterday was nomination day,' said Boyd. 'I wonder how they all got on. Nye has probably knifed Comrade Hurst by this time. He never really liked him.'

'My supporters wouldn't do anything so sporting as that,' said Beauchamp. 'Whist drives are about their limit——Conservative whist drives.'

'Nothing to a Ladies' Labour League,' said Boyd. 'I wish you knew those women at Oatlands.'

'Can't be as trying as Dodds,' said Beauchamp. 'You can't imagine how that man used to goad me on.'

The thought of Dodds, now immensely remote, perhaps a memory of Lady Edith's energy, made even his blistered hands seem a light affliction. He tugged at one of the heavy oars which lay tangled in the folds of the sail. He pushed the blade outboard. He put the oar between the thole-pins. He sat down on a thwart amidships, but the act of sitting gave

him fresh pain. The palms of his hands were not the only part of his body from which the skin had rubbed away. Rowing, as surely as riding, leads to uneasy sitting for those unaccustomed to the exercise. Beauchamp groaned. Boyd dragged out the other oar and took his place on a forward thwart. His skin was thicker than Beauchamp's and more inured to rubbing on hard seats. He showed no sign of pain.

Driven by the short plodding strokes of the two rowers the boat went wallowing towards the island.

'May as well have a look at the lobster pots as we pass,' said Boyd.

'Must we? I'm frightfully hungry?'

'No use going in yet,' said Boyd. 'Delia won't have the potatoes boiled.'

Dotted here and there in the water near the island were floating bunches of cork. Boyd, looking over his shoulder as he rowed, guided the boat to one of them. The oars were shipped. The boat lurched forward. Boyd, leaning over the gunwale, grabbed the corks. Beauchamp crouched at his side, leaning over. The boat, though heavy and broad-bottomed, listed till the water lipped over the gunwale. The two men tugged at the rope, slowly hauling up the lobster pot from its place among the rocks at the bottom. The salt water added a new smart to Beauchamp's blistered hands. The water which came on board wet the fronts of his legs. He was crouching in a pool, and the slimy mackerel of the catch were washing round his feet. With a final heave the lobster pot was hoisted on board. Boyd plunged his hand through the netted hole and drew out a fine lobster. Its claws felt about for some prey. Its tail flapped vehemently.

‘ This ’, said Boyd, ‘ is the life for me.’

Beauchamp was stirred to some delight by the sight of the lobster and the slithering fish. The sun was breaking through the upper bank of the mist and sucking up the wreaths that lay on the sea. Blistered hands and skinned surfaces in tender places may give torture, but lobsters drawn flapping from the sea and the radiant colours of freshly caught mackerel were sure consolation. There, in a cottage on the east shore of the island, Mrs. Hegarty was boiling potatoes in a great iron pot, piles of them. She was baking a large round loaf of soda bread in a pot-oven. There was more consolation in that thought.

Boyd re-baited the pot, slicing up a gurnet for the purpose, and dropped it into the sea again. It sank, gurgling. The rope paid out swiftly. The corks were flung overboard and bobbed cheerfully.

Another, another, and a fourth pot were hauled to the surface. Two were empty. One contained two crabs, broad-backed fellows, with great thick claws. In the last were two lobsters, one of them rich with coral.

‘ Now for home and dinner,’ said Boyd.

Beauchamp was all his life accustomed to reserve the word dinner for a meal eaten ceremoniously much later in the day. But he had no quarrel with its use for a full midday eating. He tugged painfully but bravely at his oar. The boat crept round the south end of the island and headed towards the landing-place in the bay. As they rowed westward the two men faced east towards the mainland where the town of Ballymoy lay, still wrapt in mist, eight long miles away. Across the water, through the still air, came the sound of spluttering throbs. Dimly through the

mist, growing every moment clearer, came a motor-boat.

'Now I wonder who the devil that is,' said Boyd.

'She's heading for Inishmee,' said Beauchamp.

'There's nowhere else she could be heading for except America.'

'I wonder——' said Beauchamp. 'I say, Boyd, it couldn't be anyone coming to look for us, could it? Dodds, or—or my wife.'

His hands were blistered, but there were good muscles in Beauchamp's arms and back. He tugged hard at his oar. Boyd, moved by the same impulse, tugged at his. It seemed very desirable to get ashore before the motor-boat reached them.

'I saw that boat', said Boyd, 'at the pier in Ballymoy as we passed through. She belongs to the priest, I think.'

'If it's only the priest', said Beauchamp, 'it's all right. It must be your soul he's after, Boyd. I'm a Protestant and it's no business of his whether I'm damned or not.'

'That's not a priest in the boat,' said Boyd. 'Whoever it is has a moustache.'

The motor-boat was drawing swiftly nearer. Every moment the figure of a man crouched in the bows grew plainer.

'It's somebody I don't know,' said Boyd. 'Not Comrade Hurst anyhow, thank God!'

Beauchamp, whose eyes were as good as Boyd's, saw that it was neither Dodds nor Lady Edith. A 'Thank God!' like Boyd's was on his lips, but he never uttered it. Instead, he appealed in desperation to a pagan deity.

'Great Jupiter!' he said. 'It's Lord Eppington.'

‘ From Tatterton Chase ! ’

‘ My father-in-law.’

The keel of the boat rasped on the beach. She stopped so abruptly that Boyd and Beauchamp were flung backwards from their seats. In a moment they were on their feet. They stepped into the shallow water. Beauchamp, splashing ashore, ran upwards towards the cottage. Boyd only paused to fling a grapnel ashore.

The throbbing of the motor-boat’s engine ceased. She glided forward, till she too grounded. The man in charge of her, a burly fellow in sea boots, lifted Lord Eppington in his arms and carried him ashore.

CHAPTER XXV

‘**I** WISH you’d sit down,’ said Beauchamp. ‘We haven’t much to offer you in the way of a chair, but if you’d take a corner of my bed——’

He was standing, rather in the manner of a naughty boy, in front of Lord Eppington. Boyd, in a corner of the cottage kitchen, was opening a large tin of *pâté de foie gras*, one of those bought from Fortnum and Mason. Lord Eppington, after looking with disapproval at three wooden-seated chairs, sat down on Charles Beauchamp’s bed. It was a curious bed, built into the wall after a fashion common in Irish cottages.

‘Deuced inconsiderate of you, Charles,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘I say inconsiderate. A man of my age, a martyr to sciatica, shouldn’t be made to race off to the west of Ireland. West of Ireland! Further, by Gad! Out into the Atlantic Ocean. Half-way to America. Not suitable to a man of my age. Not at all. I say at all. Rattling about the Atlantic in a motor-boat. Might as well be Christopher Columbus. Why did you do it? You can’t have thought I was Christopher Columbus. Never was. Don’t want to be.’

‘The fact is——’ said Beauchamp feebly, ‘I hope that bed isn’t damp. Everything here is damp. I’m afraid it’s bad for your sciatica. The fact is I was

utterly fed up with that election. I felt I had to get away.'

'I don't wonder. Don't wonder at all. The way Edith is going on would disgust anyone. Kissing the miners. Dozens of them. Scores of them. Kissing them every day. Washing little boys. Why should Edith wash little boys? Nasty job washing little boys. Not her business at all. Have you seen to-day's paper?'

'No,' said Beauchamp, 'I haven't seen a paper of any sort since I left.'

'I have one here,' said Lord Eppington. 'Bought it in Dublin this morning. Have it somewhere. Astonishing news about Edith. I say astonishing.'

'What's happened to her?' said Beauchamp.

'It's all in the paper. Why can't I find that paper? I bought that paper in Dublin this morning. Kept it to show you. Where is it?'

He felt in his pockets, patted the sides of his coat and looked round the room.

In doing so he caught sight of Boyd, who had opened his tin and was turning the *pâté* out on a plate.

'Who's that?' said Lord Eppington. 'Deuced uncomfortable thing not knowing who people are. I always like to be told a man's name. Don't see how I can be expected to be civil to a man if I don't know his name. Always want to be civil. Man in my position ought to be civil. But how can he be——? I say how? How the deuce can he be if he doesn't know the fellow's name? Why don't you tell me his name?'

'This is Mr. Boyd,' said Beauchamp. 'Let me introduce Mr. Peter Boyd, the Labour candidate for our division.'

'Thought you'd shot Boyd,' said Lord Eppington. 'Edith said you'd shot Boyd. Funeral at Holycroft St. Mary. Heard all about that. Big affair. Wasn't there myself but heard all about it. Edith told me. Or Dodds. Might have been Dodds. Chief mourner a Socialist blackguard called Hurst in a tall hat. Amazing the fellows that wear tall hats nowadays. Usen't to in my time.'

'But I didn't shoot him,' said Beauchamp.

'I assure you, my Lord,' said Boyd, 'that I haven't been buried.'

'Never said you had. Must have been another fellow of the same name. There shouldn't be two fellows with the same name. It's deuced confusing and leads to disputes. Like Shakespeare and Bacon. Never can see the sense of two fellows having the same name and then writing plays. Have you seen to-day's paper, Mr. Boyd? Remarkable performance of the Labour Party. I say remarkable. I have the paper somewhere. I'll show it to you.'

Again he searched, rather wildly, for the paper. Again he failed to find it.

'Never mind about the paper,' said Beauchamp, whose curiosity was aroused. 'Tell us what happened.'

'Rather not do that,' said Lord Eppington. 'Confusing things elections. Devilish hard to get news about elections right.'

Boyd's curiosity was also roused. He and Beauchamp begged Lord Eppington to make some attempt to tell them the news. They were met with a flat refusal.

'Won't,' said Lord Eppington. 'I say won't. Will not. I don't want to get it wrong. Important news. Ought not to get it wrong. Edith says I get things

wrong. Dodds says so. Fellow in the bank called Hurlington said so. Everybody says so. Not true, but I have to be careful. Man in my position has to be careful. It doesn't do to have people saying I get things wrong. I won't tell you. Can't run the risk. You'd say afterwards I told you wrong. I'd show it to you in the paper if I could find it. Deuced disagreeable place this, Charles. I hate a place where I can't find things. You shouldn't have come to a place like this. Why did you? I thought you'd gone to see an aunt in Eastbourne. Everybody said so. Why did you come here? I say why?'

'It seemed a long way off from everywhere,' said Beauchamp, 'and we didn't want to be found.'

'The island belongs to a distant cousin of mine,' said Boyd, 'a Mrs. Hegarty.'

'That's how we came to think of it,' said Beauchamp. 'Boyd suggested it.'

'I knew my cousin would put us up somehow,' said Boyd.

'And we didn't think anyone would find us,' said Beauchamp. 'How did you know we were here?'

'Fortnum told me,' said Lord Eppington. 'Deuced intelligent fellow, Fortnum. Knows all about invalid food. He gave me some capital stuff for my sciatica. Or it may have been Mason. Can't be sure. Mason's a very intelligent fellow too. He knows all about food. Peptonized turtle and that sort of thing.'

'But Fortnum and Mason couldn't have known where we were,' said Beauchamp, 'I never gave them any address.'

'If it wasn't Fortnum or Mason', said Lord Eppington, 'it must have been Dodds. Or else Edith. Deuced confusing business altogether. It must have

been Edith. The police told Edith. How did you get yourself mixed up with the police, Charles? Gave a dud cheque to a Jew or something. It may not have been a Jew. Old clothes man, anyhow. You shouldn't have done it, Charles. It's not a thing a man in your position ought to do. You'll get yourself blackballed for some club or other if you do things like that. Any decent club would blackmail you for giving a dud cheque to a Jew. You ought to go to a good tailor. I always said so. Can't have my son-in-law going about in second-hand clothes. Deuced unhygienic unless they're sterilized.'

It is possible that Beauchamp might have attempted some defence against this shower of amazing charges if he had been given time to think. But while he was trying to understand what Lord Eppington meant, Mrs. Hegarty walked into the cottage with a large dish of potatoes in her hands. They were beautiful potatoes, of the long-shaped kind, recently dug from one of Mrs. Hegarty's earliest ridges. They steamed on the dish, their white skins curling back and showing firm mealiness underneath.

'Here's your dinners for you,' said Mrs. Hegarty.

Lord Eppington turned as she spoke. Mrs. Hegarty met his gaze frankly. She had large violet eyes and the exquisite complexion common among women, even middle-aged women, who live in the soft, moist air of the west of Ireland. There was a pleasant smile on her full lips. Lord Eppington looked at her with approval.

'Didn't know you'd brought her here, Charles,' he said. 'I thought you'd taken her to Eastbourne to see your aunt. You oughtn't to bring a parson's wife here. Not a suitable place for a parson's wife. Nor

is Eastbourne. Eastbourne is too respectable. Monte Carlo would be better. I thought you'd taken her to Monte Carlo.'

'This', said Boyd, 'is my cousin.'

'Can't help that,' said Lord Eppington. 'No affair of mine whose cousin she is. Charles ought not to ask me to dine with her. I don't want to be strait-laced. I'm not a Puritan. I've known lots of fellows who've done it before and thought none the worse of them. But it's a bit too thick, Charles. I say thick. Thick. Considering that I am Edith's father I don't see how you can expect me to sit down and dine with her.'

'My name', said Mrs. Hegarty, in a soft cooing voice, 'is Murphy. But my husband's name was Hegarty.'

She may have felt that the position was difficult and required clearing up. But if so she effected very little by her explanation. Of the three men listening to her only Boyd knew the way in which West of Ireland women cling to their maiden names, and refuse to regard their husband's names as theirs at all.

'My husband's dead these five years. Drowned he was.'

'Can't be dead,' said Lord Eppington. 'I'd have heard of it if he'd been dead. The living is in my gift. I'd have had to find another parson if he'd been dead. Deuced difficult thing to find a parson nowadays. Why do you say he's dead? It doesn't make it a bit better if he is dead. Edith's not dead. That's the point, Charles. The parson may be dead. Don't see how he can be without my hearing of it. But even if he is you've no right—I say no right to run away from Edith. Deuced awkward position

for her. Not that she minds. If I could only find that paper I bought in Dublin this morning I'd show you that she doesn't mind. Most astonishing young woman Edith is.'

'Boyd,' said Beauchamp desperately, 'do try to find that paper. We shan't get anything explained until we find it.'

'If you don't eat them potatoes soon,' said Mrs. Hegarty, 'they'll be getting cold on you.'

'She doesn't look like a parson's wife,' said Lord Eppington. 'Can't be a parson's wife. Wouldn't look like that if she was. She must be the schoolmistress. I heard something about a schoolmistress. Shouldn't have done it, Charles. I say should not. Schoolmistresses are all right of course. Nothing to say against them. But unsuitable.'

'I don't know what on earth you're talking about,' said Beauchamp desperately. 'There's evidently been some extraordinary mistake. What's all this about parsons' wives and schoolmistresses? And Eastbourne? I've never been at Eastbourne in my life and never mean to go there.'

'Never said you did,' said Lord Eppington. 'Said Monte Carlo. Everybody said Monte Carlo. The fellow in the bank said Monte Carlo.'

'But I'm not in Monte Carlo,' said Beauchamp. 'Can't you see I'm not?'

'Everybody said you were. No affair of mine, of course. Perfect right to go to Monte Carlo if you like. But not with a parson's wife or a schoolmistress.'

'Look here,' said Beauchamp. 'Let's get this clear if it's possible to get anything clear. I'm not in Monte Carlo. Mrs. Hegarty's not a parson's wife, or a schoolmistress. She's Boyd's cousin.'

‘I’m a widow woman,’ said Mrs. Hegarty. ‘My husband’s dead this five year. And as to marrying again how could I when there’s ne’er a man on the island. Nor hasn’t been, not till them ones came.’

She let her eyes rest in gentle affection on Beauchamp and Boyd as she spoke.

‘I wouldn’t say’, she added in a soothing coo, ‘but what I might marry again if so be there was a man who took my fancy and him to ask me.’

This time it was only on Beauchamp that her eyes rested.

‘You can’t marry Charles,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘I say can’t. Charles is married already. It won’t do for him to commit bigamy. Things are bad enough without that. A fellow goes to gaol for bigamy. Can’t have my son-in-law in gaol. Deuced awkward for a man in my position to have a son-in-law in gaol. I don’t care whether it’s forging cheques or shooting agitators or bigamy.’

‘Would you like now’, said Mrs. Hegarty, ‘that I’d boil you a lobster for your dinner. I might warm up the potatoes while I’m at it. The strange gentleman might fancy a lobster.’

‘Lobster!’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Of course I’d like a lobster. Always like lobsters. Good for sciatica. Nothing better than a lobster for a fellow suffering from sciatica. Fortnum said so. Devilish thoughtful of you to suggest a lobster, Mrs. — Now what did you say her name was, Charles? Edith said Priestly. You say Edith was wrong. Name’s not Priestly. I wish Edith wouldn’t mumble. Never can get names right when Edith tells them to me. Detestable habit mumbling.’

‘Mrs. Hegarty,’ said Beauchamp. ‘H-E-G-A-R-T-Y—Hegarty. Boyd’s cousin.’

‘You could call me Delia’, said Mrs. Hegarty, ‘if it pleases you.’

Her violet eyes were full of tenderness as she looked at Lord Eppington.

‘You can’t marry me,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘I’m too old. I say old. Old. And I’ve got sciatica. Had sciatica for years.’

‘Marry you! It’s a nurse you want, not a wife,’ said Mrs. Hegarty.

‘Don’t want a nurse. Won’t have a nurse. Had one once. Edith’s fault. Edith said I ought to have a nurse and insisted. Never was so bullied in my life. She used to wash my face. I say my face. Face. Detestable woman. Wouldn’t believe there was such a detestable woman if I hadn’t known her. Are you a nurse?’

‘I am not,’ said Mrs. Hegarty. ‘I’m a widow woman. My name’s Murphy, but my husband’s name——’

‘Get away out of this, Delia,’ said Boyd. ‘Go and boil a few lobsters. We’ll eat the potatoes while you’re doing it. You’ll find three in the boat which Mr. Beauchamp and I have just brought home. And there are a couple of crabs. Boil them too, will you?’

‘I will surely,’ said Mrs. Hegarty, and sidled out of the door with her eyes still on Lord Eppington.

‘Intelligent woman that,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Thought of lobsters the moment she saw me. I knew she couldn’t be a schoolmistress. No schoolmistress is intelligent enough to think of lobsters. Always said she couldn’t be a parson’s wife. She said I wanted a nurse though. Wrong there. Quite

wrong. I don't. I want a lobster. Nice place this, Charles. Capital place. Full of lobsters. Glad I came here.'

'There's worse places than this,' said Boyd. 'I have a great fancy for it myself.'

'Buy it then,' said Lord Eppington. 'I was thinking of buying it myself, but I don't want to cut in against you. Deuced unfair thing to cut in. If you want it, Boyd, make an offer.'

'I might get it without buying it,' said Boyd thoughtfully. 'I've been thinking that I might do worse than marry Delia.'

'Oh, come on, and let's eat,' said Beauchamp. 'You can't marry her to-day, Boyd, and the potatoes are getting cold. Mrs. Hegarty was quite right about that. It seems to me that she's the only one who's spoken a word of sense since we came in.'

'Nice-looking potatoes,' said Lord Eppington. 'New potatoes. Always like new potatoes. Don't mind how many new potatoes I eat. Good for sciatica. Fortnum said so.'

He rose from his seat on Beauchamp's bed and took the chair which Boyd set for him at the table.

CHAPTER XXVI

‘IS this your paper?’ said Beauchamp.

He picked up a copy of the *Irish Times* from his bed. Lord Eppington had been sitting on it.

‘Can’t read it now,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Bad habit reading at meals. Never do it.’

He helped himself to three of Mrs. Hegarty’s excellent potatoes. Boyd gave him a slice of *pâté de foie gras* and handed him the saucer which held the butter.

An English general election is no longer a matter of supreme importance to the inhabitants of Southern Ireland. But the *Irish Times* had printed a list of the unopposed returns. There were fourteen of them, but there was only one of any great interest. To it the *Irish Times* had devoted a whole paragraph with a large headline.

REMARKABLE OCCURRENCE IN A WEST OF ENGLAND CONSTITUENCY.

‘Among the candidates returned unopposed to the new Parliament is Lady Edith Beauchamp.’

Beauchamp read so far and gasped.

‘Boyd,’ he said, ‘look at this. My wife has been returned without a contest.’

‘Told you so,’ said Lord Eppington, speaking with some difficulty, for he had a good deal of potato in his mouth. ‘Told you so. You wouldn’t believe me,

of course. Nobody ever believes me. Edith says I get things wrong. Not true at all. Had that quite right, but you wouldn't believe me till you saw it in the paper.'

Boyd, leaning over Beauchamp's shoulder, read the paragraph. There was more in it than the mere announcement of Lady Edith's return. That in itself would scarcely have justified the 'REMARKABLE OCCURRENCE' headline. What followed deserved an even stronger description.

Lady Edith, it appeared, had been returned not only unopposed but unanimously. Twenty-four nomination papers had been handed in, twelve of them signed by prominent members of the Conservative Party, the other twelve by the inhabitants of the mining area who had all of them hitherto been strong Socialists. One of these papers was signed by the members of the Committee of the Oatlands Ladies' Labour League. Another bore the names of Mrs. Nye and her three friendly neighbours. The secretary of the Miners' Union had signed one paper and under his name were those of Sam Pratt and Bert Jones.

There had been an unseemly scramble in the Court-house in Winstock when the nomination papers were handed in. Each party wished to have the credit of being the first to nominate the successful candidate.

'The situation thus created', said the *Irish Times* cautiously, 'is believed to be without parallel since the days of Simon de Montfort.'

Whether it had a parallel then the writer did not say, probably because he did not know.

'Well,' said Boyd, after a long pause, 'that bangs Banagher!'

'It's the funniest thing I've ever heard of in English

politics,' said Beauchamp. 'It's damned funny. But one comfort about it is that I can go home now without being let in for any more electioneering.'

'Funny!' said Lord Eppington. 'Call that funny. It may seem funny to you, but it's deuced awkward for me. Daughter of mine going into Parliament as a Socialist. Don't like it. I'll be meeting fellows in the House of Lords—must meet fellows in the House of Lords. What am I to say? Fellows will all tell me I oughtn't to stand it. Fellows will tell me I ought to smack her. Devilish awkward position for me. Should have thought it was devilish awkward for you too, Charles.'

'But she's just as much a Conservative as a Socialist,' said Beauchamp. 'All the Conservatives signed her nomination papers. She represents them.'

'Don't see it,' said Lord Eppington. 'I say don't see it. Don't. I may be stupid but I don't see it. She's nominated by Socialists. Can't get over that, you know. All your fault, Charles. You shouldn't have run away with that parson's wife.'

'I didn't,' said Beauchamp. 'I don't suppose it's much use saying so, but I didn't. I never saw a parson's wife in my life that I wanted to run away with.'

'Never said you did,' said Lord Eppington. 'Said you shot the Labour candidate. Shouldn't have done it. Puts the Labour Party in the deuce of an awkward position. If their candidate is shot, what are they to do? Must nominate somebody. Edith the only person there. They nominate Edith. All your fault.'

'Anyhow,' said Beauchamp, 'I'm going home at once. It's time I did if I'm accused of every crime in the calendar.'

‘Capital potatoes,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Capital butter. Capital *pâté*. Wonder how long it takes to boil a lobster.’

‘Would you like now——’ Mrs. Hegarty stood at the door smiling. ‘Would you like now that I’d fry a few mackerel for you?’

‘Mackerel!’ said Lord Eppington. ‘Capital fish mackerel, if fresh. Poison if at all stale.’

‘Beauchamp and I caught them this morning,’ said Boyd.

‘I shall stay here,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘You can take that motor-boat and go home if you like, Charles. Go home and look after Edith. Your job, not mine. No affair of mine if she turns Socialist. I shall stay here with Boyd and Mrs. Boyd. Shan’t have to meet fellows in the House of Lords if I stay here. Plenty of lobsters. Nice place. Nice fellow Boyd. Nice woman Mrs. Boyd.’

‘If it’s me you’re meaning,’ said Mrs. Hegarty, ‘I’m not married to Peter yet and maybe never will be.’

‘He’s going to marry you,’ said Lord Eppington. ‘He says so. Must do it. Can’t go back on his word. I’ll marry you myself if Boyd backs out. Quite time I married somebody. Charles can’t look after Edith. I haven’t time to look after Edith. She wants a mother to look after her. Stepmother, by Gad! I say stepmother. Step.’

‘If I’m to marry either of you,’ said Mrs. Hegarty, ‘I’d as soon it was Peter.’

CHAPTER XXVII

LADY EDITH, with the help of Peterson, was trying on a new dress. It was the most striking which Madame Tzaan had designed since the election campaign began. The main colour was a dim grey, something like the fur of a mouse; but this was 'relieved' (the word used by Madame Tzaan's chief assistant) by streaks of vivid scarlet, which began by being broad at the bottom of the skirt and tapered upwards into fine points, sometimes dividing on the bodice into two parts, giving a flame-like effect.

Peterson, kneeling behind her mistress, sniffed slightly as she adjusted the garment. Her own taste in dress was severe. Scarlet was not, in her opinion, 'her ladyship's colour', and, besides, she did not see what use she could make of this dress when it came into her possession. She could not possibly wear it herself. It was too bizarre to be easily sold.

She was still sniffing, and Lady Edith was still admiring herself in the long glass when there was a tap at the door. Without waiting for permission Charles Beauchamp walked in.

For a moment he stood in mute astonishment. The dress really was amazing. Before he said a word Lady Edith caught sight of him in the glass. She

turned swiftly, rushed across the room, almost upsetting the kneeling Peterson, and flung her arms round his neck.

‘Charles, darlingest one!’ she said. ‘I am so glad you’re home again. I do hope you enjoyed yourself and caught lots and lots of fish. Or was it golf? Dad said it was fishing. That’s what makes me think it must have been golf. The poor sweet does get things so wrong, doesn’t he? Did you do the long hole in five? I’m sure you did and got your handicap down a lot.’

Charles, having kissed her twice, disentangled himself from her arms.

‘Good heavens, Edith!’ he said. ‘What’s that dress?’

‘Oh, that’s for the torchlight procession at Holycroft St. Mary to-night,’ said Lady Edith. ‘You see the idea, don’t you? Flames against the midnight sky in June. So wonderful of Madame Tzaan to think of it. Just fancy the darling miners getting up a torchlight procession for me! It’s called the Victory March and we’re all going to sing something about a red flag.’

‘I was afraid at first’, said Charles, ‘that it might be a fancy-dress ball and that I should have to go to it.’

Lady Edith flung her arms round his neck again.

‘Charles, my own,’ she said. ‘I always knew that you were better than any of us at politics if you’d only give your mind to it and take it seriously. A fancy-dress ball is just what we want and I never thought of it. I’ll go as Boadicea in a chariot with scythes, and I’ll have little Alf Nye to carry my train and you shall be Sir Walter Raleigh.’

‘ No. I won’t. Quite definitely, Edith, I won’t.’

‘ But wouldn’t you like to spread out a cloak for me to walk over ? How disappointing of you, Charles, when everybody else is doing such a lot. The vicar of Nether Pemberton is having a Victory Whist Drive. Rather sweet of him considering all the talk there was about you and his wife. Not that I ever thought you even kissed her. You didn’t, did you ? ’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ The poor darling,’ said Lady Edith. ‘ So disappointing for her. But I daresay it was better not to, really. It might have put wrong ideas into her head.’

‘ Your father says ’, said Charles, ‘ that you’ve been kissing miners. I hope they won’t get wrong ideas into their heads.’

Once more Lady Edith embraced him with immense fervour.

‘ Charles,’ she said, ‘ I love you more and more. You do think of such glorious things. I’ll kiss them to-night at the torchlight procession, dozens of them. So thrilling for the dear pets being kissed in the dark. And to-morrow night I’ll kiss Farmer Tuke. Do you remember Farmer Tuke at Pell Magna ? Such a splendid man who said he’d always been a Conservative and always would be. So loyal of him. He’s made a victory cheese. It’s perfectly enormous, and it’s to be set out on a trestle table outside the church with a Union Jack sticking in it and I’m to cut it with a sword of Colonel Enfield’s and everybody is to have bits to take home. And Colonel Enfield is going to give medals to all the schoolchildren, with palm leaves on them which mean victory. You heard I’ve been elected, didn’t you, Charles ? ’

'I saw it in the paper,' said Charles. 'Delighted, of course.'

'How sweet of you, dearest one. I was afraid you might be just a teeny weeny little bit jealous.'

'Not in the least,' said Charles. 'Not in the very least. So long as they didn't elect me——'

'But they would have, Charles. I'm sure they would, if you hadn't gone off to play golf. So naughty of you. I've got a milkmaid dress to wear when I'm cutting the cheese. So appropriate, isn't it? Or do you think I ought to wear white, with a veil and orange blossoms? It'll be rather like cutting a wedding cake, won't it? Then you could stand beside me.'

'No, I won't. Get that firmly into your head, Edith. I won't.'

'In a top hat and frock coat with a gardenia in your buttonhole. But if you'd rather not I won't ask you to. Only I do hope you won't buy any more ready-made clothes. Poor Dad was so vexed about that. He said you'd gone to play golf in a second-hand red coat. I knew you hadn't, of course.'

'I haven't been playing golf. I simply went away because I was jolly well fed up with this beastly election. I wouldn't have come home if I hadn't thought it was all over when they elected you. It seems to me now that it's worse than ever.'

'But it is over, darlingest. You can't call Farmer Tuke's cheese an election, now can you? And anyway, we won't be here much longer. I've taken a house in Smith Street. It's not Mayfair of course, but it's quite close to Parliament so that I shall be able to pop in and out all day and the Speaker will come to tea every afternoon and the Prime Minister and all

the darling members. And I shall have a salon, like Aspasia—or am I thinking of Madame de Maintenon? You know the kind of lady I mean, so gracious to every one and so wise. Or was it Egeria? I do wish I'd paid more attention to my lessons when I was at school. And Dad will run in from the House of Lords and tell us what the sweet old pets say about the Labour Party.'

'Your father', said Charles, 'is thinking of marrying again. He was in the act of proposing when I saw him last. She's a cousin of Boyd's and coos like a pigeon when she speaks.'

'How divine!' said Lady Edith. 'Do you know, Charles, if anything had happened to you I think I should have married Boyd. Either Boyd or Sergeant Mole. I do think class distinctions ought to be done away with, don't you? That's why I'm going to have everybody at our fancy-dress ball. All the dear miners and Colonel Enfield and Farmer Tuke and everybody.'

Printed in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner, Ltd.,
Frome and London

**METHUEN'S
GENERAL LITERATURE**



A SELECTION OF MESSRS. METHUEN'S PUBLICATIONS

This Catalogue contains only a selection of the more important books published by Messrs. Methuen. A complete catalogue of their publications may be obtained on application.

ARMSTRONG (Anthony) ('A. A.' of Punch)

WARRIORS AT EASE
WARRIORS STILL AT EASE
PERCIVAL AND I
PERCIVAL AT PLAY
ME AND FRANCES
HOW TO DO IT

Each 3s. 6d. net.

LIVESTOCK IN BARRACKS
Illustrated by E. H. SHEPARD.
6s. net.

TWO LEGS AND FOUR
Illustrated by RENÉ BULL.
5s. net.

BAGENAL (Hope) and WOOD (Alex.)
PLANNING FOR GOOD ACOUSTICS
Illustrated. *£1 1s. net.*

BAIKIE (James)
EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES IN THE NILE
VALLEY. Illustrated. *£1 1s. net.*

BAIN (F. W.)
A DIGIT OF THE MOON
THE DESCENT OF THE SUN
A HEIFER OF THE DAWN
IN THE GREAT GOD'S HAIR
A DRAUGHT OF THE BLUE
AN ESSENCE OF THE DUSK
AN INCARNATION OF THE SNOW
A MINE OF FAULTS
THE ASHES OF A GOD
BUBBLES OF THE FOAM
A SYRUP OF THE BEES

THE LIVERY OF EVE
THE SUBSTANCE OF A DREAM
Each 3s. 6d. net.
AN ECHO OF THE SPHERES
10s. 6d. net.

BALFOUR (Sir Graham)
THE LIFE OF ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON
Twenty-first Edition. *10s. 6d. net.*

BARKER (Ernest)
NATIONAL CHARACTER *10s. 6d. net.*
GREEK POLITICAL THEORY *14s. net.*
CHURCH, STATE AND STUDY *10s. 6d. net.*

BELLOC (Hilaire)
PARIS *8s. 6d. net.*
THE PYRENEES *8s. 6d. net.*
MARIE ANTOINETTE *18s. net.*
A HISTORY OF ENGLAND
In 5 Vols. Vols. I, II and III
Each 15s. net.

ON NOTHING
HILLS AND THE SEA
ON SOMETHING
THIS AND THAT AND THE OTHER
ON
FIRST AND LAST
ON EVERYTHING
ON ANYTHING
EMMANUEL BURDEN
A PICKED COMPANY
Each 3s. 6d. net.

BIRMINGHAM (George A.)**A WAYFARER IN HUNGARY**

Illustrated. 8s. 6d. net.

SPILLIKINS : ESSAYS 3s. 6d. net.**SHIPS AND SEALING-WAX : ESSAYS**
3s. 6d. net.**BUDGE (Sir E. A. Wallis)****A HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA: NUBIA
AND ABYSSINIA**

Illustrated. 2 vols. £3 13s. 6d. net.

CHESTERTON (G. K.)**COME TO THINK OF IT . . .**
6s. net.**G.K.C. AS M.C.** 7s. 6d. net.**THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE**
3s. 6d. net.Also Illustrated by ROBERT
AUSTIN. 12s. 6d. net.**CHARLES DICKENS****GENERALLY SPEAKING****ALL THINGS CONSIDERED****TREMENDOUS TRIFLES****FANCIES VERSUS FADS****ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS****A MISCELLANY OF MEN****THE USES OF DIVERSITY****THE OUTLINE OF SANITY****THE FLYING INN**

Each 3s. 6d. net.

A GLEAMING COHORT 2s. 6d. net.**WINE, WATER AND SONG**
1s. 6d. net.**CLUTTON-BROCK (A.)****WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?****ESSAYS ON ART****SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET**

Each 5s. net.

ESSAYS ON BOOKS 3s. 6d. net.**MORE ESSAYS ON BOOKS****ESSAYS ON LIFE****ESSAYS ON RELIGION****ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND LIFE****MORE ESSAYS ON RELIGION**

Each 6s. net.

SHELLEY, THE MAN AND THE POET

Illustrated. 7s. 6d. net.

CRAWLEY (Ernest)**THE MYSTIC ROSE.** Revised and
Enlarged by THEODORE BESTER-
MAN. 2 vols. £1 10s. net.**STUDIES OF SAVAGES AND SEX**Edited by THEODORE BESTERMAN.
10s. 6d. net.**DRESS, DRINKS AND DRUMS.**Edited by THEODORE BESTER-
MAN. 10s. 6d. net.**DUGDALE (E. T. S.)****GERMAN DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS,**
1871-1914Selected from the Documents pub-
lished by the German Foreign
Office. In 4 vols. Vol. I, 1871-
90. Vol. II, 1891-8. Vol. III,
1898-1910. Vol. IV, 1911-1914.

Each £1 1s. net.

EDWARDES (Tickner)**THE LORE OF THE HONEY-BEE**Illustrated. 7s. 6d. and 3s. 6d. net.
BEEKEEPING FOR ALL

Illustrated. 3s. 6d. net.

THE BEE-MASTER OF WARRILOW

Illustrated. 7s. 6d. net.

BEE-KEEPING DO'S AND DON'T'S
2s. 6d. net.**EINSTEIN (Albert)****RELATIVITY: THE SPECIAL AND
GENERAL THEORY** 5s. net.**SIDELIGHTS ON RELATIVITY**

3s. 6d. net.

THE MEANING OF RELATIVITY

5s. net.

THE BROWNIAN MOVEMENT

5s. net.

EISLER (Robert)**THE MESSIAH JESUS AND JOHN THE
BAPTIST:** according to Flavius
Josephus' recently rediscovered
'Capture of Jerusalem' and
the other Jewish and Christian
sources. Translated by A. HAG-
GERTY KRAPPE.

Illustrated. Demy 8vo. £2 2s. net.

FIELD (G. C.)**MORAL THEORY** 6s. net.**PLATO AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES**
12s. 6d. net.**FYLEMAN (Rose)****FAIRIES AND CHIMNEYS****THE FAIRY GREEN****THE FAIRY FLUTE****THE RAINBOW CAT****EIGHT LITTLE PLAYS FOR CHILDREN****FORTY GOOD-NIGHT TALES****FAIRIES AND FRIENDS****THE ADVENTURE CLUB****FORTY GOOD-MORNING TALES****SEVEN LITTLE PLAYS FOR CHILDREN****TWENTY TEA-TIME TALES**

Each 3s. 6d. net.

FYLEMAN (Rose)—continued**THE DOLLS' HOUSE**Illustrated by MARGARET TEMPEST.
5s. net.**GAY GO UP**Illustrated by DECIE MERWIN.
5s. net.**THE ROSE FYLEMAN FAIRY BOOK**Illustrated by HILDA MILLER.
10s. 6d. net.**A GARLAND OF ROSE'S : COLLECTED POEMS**Illustrated by RENÉ BULL.
8s. 6d. net.**GIBBON (Edward)****THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE**With Notes, Appendixes and Maps,
by J. B. BURY. Illustrated. 7 vols.
Demy 8vo. 15s. net each volume.
Also, unillustrated. Crown 8vo.
7s. 6d. net each volume.**GLADSTONE (Mary) (Mrs. Drew)****HER DIARIES AND LETTERS**

Illustrated. £1 1s. net.

GLOVER (T. R.)**VIRGIL****THE CONFLICT OF RELIGIONS IN THE
EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE**
POETS AND PURITANS

Each 10s. 6d. net.

FROM PERICLES TO PHILIP

12s. 6d. net.

GRAHAM (Harry)**THE WORLD WE LAUGH IN : More
Departmental Ditties**Illustrated by 'FISH'. *Eighth
Edition.* 5s. net.**STRAINED RELATIONS**Illustrated by H. STUART MENZIES
and HENDY 6s. net.**THE WORLD'S WORKERS**Illustrated by 'FOUGASSE'.
5s. net.**ADAM'S APPLES**Illustrated by JOHN REYNOLDS.
5s. net.**GRAHAME (Kenneth)****'THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS**

207th Thousand. 7s. 6d. net.

Also illustrated by WYNDHAM
PAYNE. 7s. 6d. net.

Also unillustrated. 3s. 6d. net.

See also Milne (A. A.)

HADFIELD (J. A.)**PSYCHOLOGY AND MORALS***Eighth Edition.* Crown 8vo. 6s. net.**HALL (H. R.)****THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE
NEAR EAST**

Illustrated. £1 1s. net.

**THE CIVILIZATION OF GREECE IN
THE BRONZE AGE**

Illustrated. £1 10s. net.

**A SEASON'S WORK AT UR OF THE
CHALDEES.** Illustrated. £1 5s. net.**HEATON (Rose Henniker)****THE PERFECT HOSTESS**

Decorated by A. E. TAYLOR

7s. 6d. net. Gift Edition, £1 1s. net.

HERBERT (A. P.)**HONEYBUBBLE & Co.** 6s. net.**MISLEADING CASES IN THE COMMON
LAW.** With an Introduction by
LORD HEWART. 5s. net.**MORE MISLEADING CASES.** 5s. net.**WISDOM FOR THE WISE**Illustrated by GEORGE MORROW.
5s. net.**THE WHEREFORE AND THE WHY**Illustrated by GEORGE MORROW.
3s. 6d. net.**THE BOMBER GIPSY** 3s. 6d. net.**THE SECRET BATTLE** 3s. 6d. net.**TANTIVY TOWERS** 2s. 6d. net.**HOLDSWORTH (Sir W. S.)****A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LAW**

Nine Volumes. £1 5s. net each.

HUDSON (W. H.)**A SHEPHERD'S LIFE**

Illustrated. 10s. 6d. net.

Also unillustrated. 3s. 6d. net.

HUTTON (Edward)**CITIES OF SICILY**

Illustrated. 10s. 6d. net.

MILAN AND LOMBARDY**THE CITIES OF ROMAGNA AND THE
MARCHES****SIENA AND SOUTHERN TUSCANY****NAPLES AND SOUTHERN ITALY**

Illustrated. Each 8s. 6d. net.

**A WAYFARER IN UNKNOWN TUS-
CANY****THE CITIES OF SPAIN****THE CITIES OF UMBRIA****COUNTRY WALKS ABOUT FLORENCE
ROME****FLORENCE AND NORTHERN TUSCANY****VENICE AND VENETIA**

Illustrated. Each 7s. 6d. net.

**INGE (W. R.), D.D., Dean of St.
Paul's****CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM**

(The Bampton Lectures of 1899).

Sixth Edition. 7s. 6d. net.

KIPLING (Rudyard)**BARRACK-ROOM BALLADS**

255th Thousand.

THE SEVEN SEAS

186th Thousand.

THE FIVE NATIONS

143rd Thousand.

DEPARTMENTAL DITTIES

117th Thousand.

THE YEARS BETWEEN

95th Thousand.

Four Editions of these famous volumes of poems are now published, viz. :—

Crown 8vo. Buckram, 7s. 6d. net.

Fcap. 8vo. Cloth, 6s. net.

Leather 7s. 6d. net.

Service Edition. Two volumes each book. Square Fcap. 8vo.

3s. net each volume.

A KIPLING ANTHOLOGY—VERSE

Sixth Edition.

Leather 7s. 6d. net,

Cloth 6s. net and 3s. 6d. net.

TWENTY POEMS FROM RUDYARD**KIPLING**

486th Thousand. 1s. net.

A CHOICE OF SONGS

Second Edition. 2s. net.

LAISTNER (M. L. W.)**THOUGHT AND LETTERS IN WESTERN****EUROPE (A.D. 500-900). 15s. net****LAMB (Charles and Mary)****THE COMPLETE WORKS**

Edited by E. V. LUCAS. Six

Volumes. With Frontispieces.

6s. net each.

SELECTED LETTERS

Edited by G. T. CLAPTON.

3s. 6d. net.

THE CHARLES LAMB DAY BOOK

Compiled by E. V. LUCAS.

6s. net.

LANKESTER (Sir Ray)**SCIENCE FROM AN EASY CHAIR****SCIENCE FROM AN EASY CHAIR:**

Second Series

DIVERSIONS OF A NATURALIST**GREAT AND SMALL THINGS**

Illustrated. Each 7s. 6d. net.

SECRETS OF EARTH AND SEA

Illustrated. 8s. 6d. net.

LINDRUM (Walter)**BILLIARDS. Illustrated. 6s. net.****LODGE (Sir Oliver)****MAN AND THE UNIVERSE**

7s. 6d. net and 3s. 6d. net.

THE SURVIVAL OF MAN

7s. 6d. net.

RAYMOND 10s. 6d. net.**RAYMOND REVISED** 6s. net.**MODERN PROBLEMS** 3s. 6d. net.**REASON AND BELIEF** 3s. 6d. net.**THE SUBSTANCE OF FAITH**

2s. net.

RELATIVITY 1s. net.**CONVICTION OF SURVIVAL** 2s. net.**LUCAS (E. V.)****THE LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB**

2 Vols. £1 1s. net.

THE COLVINS AND THEIR FRIENDS

£1 1s. net.

VERMEER THE MAGICAL 5s. net.**A WANDERER IN ROME****A WANDERER IN HOLLAND****A WANDERER IN LONDON****LONDON REVISITED (Revised)****A WANDERER IN PARIS****A WANDERER IN FLORENCE****A WANDERER IN VENICE**

Each 10s. 6d. net.

A WANDERER AMONG PICTURES

8s. 6d. net.

E. V. LUCAS'S LONDON £1 net.**INTRODUCING LONDON****INTRODUCING PARIS**

Each 2s. 6d. net.

THE OPEN ROAD 6s. net.

Also, illustrated by CLAUDE A.

SHEPPERSON, A.R.W.S.

10s. 6d. net.

Also, India Paper.

Leather, 7s. 6d. net.

THE JOY OF LIFE

6s. net. Leather Edition, 7s. 6d. net.

Also, India Paper.

Leather, 7s. 6d. net.

THE GENTLEST ART 3s. 6d. net.**AND THE SECOND POST** 3s. 6d. net.

Also together in one volume.

7s. 6d. net.

FIRESIDE AND SUNSHINE**CHARACTER AND COMEDY****GOOD COMPANY****ONE DAY AND ANOTHER****OLD LAMPS FOR NEW****LOITERER'S HARVEST****LUCK OF THE YEAR****EVENTS AND EMBROIDERIES****A FRONDED ISLE****A ROVER I WOULD BE****GIVING AND RECEIVING****HER INFINITE VARIETY****ENCOUNTERS AND DIVERSIONS**

Each 3s. 6d. net.

LUCAS (E. V.)—continued

CLOUD AND SILVER
A BOSWELL OF BAGHDAD
TWIXT EAGLE AND DOVE
THE PHANTOM JOURNAL
ZIGZAGS IN FRANCE
TURNING THINGS OVER
TRAVELLER'S LUCK

Each 6s. net.

FRENCH LEAVES

Illustrated. *5s. net.*

ROVING EAST AND ROVING WEST
5s. net.

Mr. Punch's COUNTY SONGS

Illustrated by E. H. SHEPARD.
10s. 6d. net.

'THE MORE I SEE OF MEN . . .'

OUT OF A CLEAR SKY

IF DOGS COULD WRITE

' . . . AND SUCH SMALL DEER '

Each 3s. 6d. net.

THE PEKINESE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Illustrated by PERSIS KIRMSB.
1s. net.

See also Lamb (Charles).

LYND (Robert)

IT'S A FINE WORLD *5s. net.*

THE GREEN MAN

THE PLEASURES OF IGNORANCE

THE GOLDFISH

THE LITTLE ANGEL

THE BLUE LION

THE PEAL OF BELLS

THE MONEY-BOX

THE ORANGE TREE

Each 3s. 6d. net.

MCDUGALL (William)

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL
PSYCHOLOGY *10s. 6d. net.*

NATIONAL WELFARE AND NATIONAL
DECAY *6s. net.*

AN OUTLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY
10s. 6d. net.

AN OUTLINE OF ABNORMAL PSYCHO-
LOGY *15s. net.*

BODY AND MIND *12s. 6d. net.*

CHARACTER AND THE CONDUCT OF
LIFE *10s. 6d. net.*

MODERN MATERIALISM AND EMERG-
ENT EVOLUTION *7s. 6d. net.*

ETHICS AND SOME MODERN WORLD
PROBLEMS *7s. 6d. net.*

MALLET (Sir C. E.)

A HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

In 3 vols. *Each £1 1s. net.*

MAETERLINCK (Maurice)

THE BLUE BIRD *6s. net.*

Also, illustrated by F. CAYLEY
ROBINSON. *10s. 6d. net.*

OUR ETERNITY *6s. net.*

THE UNKNOWN GUEST *6s. net.*

POEMS *5s. net.*

THE WRACK OF THE STORM
6s. net.

THE BURGOMASTER OF STILEMONDE
5s. net.

THE BETROTHAL *6s. net.*

MOUNTAIN PATHS *6s. net.*

THE GREAT SECRET *7s. 6d. net.*

THE CLOUD THAT LIFTED and THE
POWER OF THE DEAD *7s. 6d. net.*

MARY MAGDALENE *2s. net.*

MARLOWE (Christopher)

THE WORKS. In 6 volumes.

General Editor, R. H. CASE.

THE LIFE OF MARLOWE, by C. F.
TUCKER BROOKE, and DIDO.

Edited by the Same. *8s. 6d. net.*

TAMBURLAINE, I AND II. Edited by
U. M. ELLIS-FERMOR. *10s. 6d. net.*

THE JEW OF MALTA and THE
MASSACRE AT PARIS

Edited by H. S. BENNETT.

10s. 6d. net.

MASEFIELD (John)

ON THE SPANISH MAIN *8s. 6d. net.*

A SAILOR'S GARLAND *3s. 6d. net.*

SEA LIFE IN NELSON'S TIME
7s. 6d. net.

METHUEN (Sir A.)

AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN VERSE
232nd Thousand.

SHAKESPEARE TO HARDY: An
Anthology of English Lyrics
28th Thousand.

Each, Cloth, 6s. net.

Leather, 7s. 6d. net.

MILNE (A. A.)

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

6s. net.

TOAD OF TOAD HALL

A Play founded on Kenneth
Grahame's 'The Wind in the
Willows.' *5s. net and 2s. 6d. net.*

THOSE WERE THE DAYS: Collected
Stories *7s. 6d. net.*

NOT THAT IT MATTERS

IF I MAY

THE SUNNY SIDE

THE RED HOUSE MYSTERY

ONCE A WEEK

THE HOLIDAY ROUND

THE DAY'S PLAY

MILNE (A. A.)—continued**MR. PIM PASSES BY***Each 3s. 6d. net.***WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG***211th Thousand.***WINNIE-THE-POOH***118th Thousand.***NOW WE ARE SIX***119th Thousand.***THE HOUSE AT POOH CORNER***105th Thousand.**Each illustrated by E. H. SHEPARD.**7s. 6d. net. Leather, 10s. 6d. net.***THE CHRISTOPHER ROBIN STORY BOOK. Third Edition.***Illustrated by E. H. SHEPARD.**5s. net.***THE CHRISTOPHER ROBIN BIRTH-DAY BOOK***Illustrated by E. H. SHEPARD.**3s. 6d. net.***MILNE (A. A.) and FRASER-SIMSON (H.)****FOURTEEN SONGS FROM 'WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG'***Thirteenth Edition. 7s. 6d. net.***TEDDY BEAR AND OTHER SONGS FROM 'WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG'***7s. 6d. net.***THE KING'S BREAKFAST***Third Edition. 3s. 6d. net.***SONGS FROM 'NOW WE ARE SIX'***Second Edition. 7s. 6d. net.***MORE 'VERY YOUNG' SONGS***7s. 6d. net.***THE HUMS OF POOH***Words by A. A. MILNE.**Music by H. FRASER-SIMSON.**Decorations by E. H. SHEPARD.***MORTON (H. V.)****THE HEART OF LONDON***35th Thousand. 3s. 6d. net.***Also with Scissor Cuts by L. HUMMEL.***6s. net.***THE SPELL OF LONDON***20th Thousand.***THE NIGHTS OF LONDON***13th Thousand. Each 3s. 6d. net.***IN SEARCH OF ENGLAND***74th Thousand.***THE CALL OF ENGLAND***31st Thousand.***IN SEARCH OF SCOTLAND***96th Thousand***IN SEARCH OF IRELAND***40th Thousand.***IN SEARCH OF LONDON***Each illustrated. 7s. 6d. net.***NEUBURGER (Albert)****THE TECHNICAL ARTS AND SCIENCES OF THE ANCIENTS***Translated by H. L. BROSE.**Illustrated. £2 2s. net.***OMAN (Sir Charles)****A HISTORY OF THE ART OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE AGES, A.D. 378-1485***2 vols. Illustrated. £1 16s. net.***STUDIES IN THE NAPOLEONIC WARS***8s. 6d. net.***PERRY (W. J.)****THE ORIGIN OF MAGIC AND RELIGION****THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATION***Each 6s. net.***THE CHILDREN OF THE SUN***£1 1s. net***PETRIE (Sir Flinders)****A HISTORY OF EGYPT***In 6 Volumes.***Vol. I. FROM THE 1ST TO THE XVTH DYNASTY***Eleventh Edition, Revised.**12s. net.***Vol. II. THE XVIIITH AND XVIIIITH DYNASTIES***Seventh Edition, Revised. 9s. net.***Vol. III. XIXTH TO XXXTH DYNASTIES***Third Edition. 12s. net.***Vol. IV. EGYPT UNDER THE PTOLEMAIC DYNASTY***By EDWYN BEVAN. 15s. net.***Vol. V. EGYPT UNDER ROMAN RULE***By J. G. MILNE. Third Edition, Revised. 12s. net.***Vol. VI. EGYPT IN THE MIDDLE AGES***By STANLEY LANE POOLE.**Fourth Edition. 10s. net.***PONSONBY OF SHULBREDE****(Lord)****ENGLISH DIARIES***£1 1s. net.***MORE ENGLISH DIARIES***12s. 6d. net.***SCOTTISH AND IRISH DIARIES***10s. 6d. net.***RUTTER (Frank)****EL GRECO. Illustrated. £1 16s. net.****SELLAR (W. C.) and YEATMAN (R. J.)****1066 AND ALL THAT***Illustrated by JOHN REYNOLDS.**50th Thousand.**5s. net.*

STEVENSON (R. L.)

THE LETTERS Edited by Sir SIDNEY COLVIN. 4 Vols. *Each* 6s. *net.*

STOW (G. W.) and BLEEK (Dorothea F.)

ROCK PAINTINGS IN SOUTH AFRICA
Illustrated. £2 2s. *net.*

SURTEES (R. S.)

HANDLEY CROSS

MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR

ASK MAMMA

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS

PLAIN OR RINGLET?

HILLINGDON HALL

Each illustrated. 7s. 6d. *net.*

JORROCKS'S JAUNTS AND JOLLITIES

HAWBUCK GRANGE

Each illustrated. 6s. *net.*

TAYLOR (A. E.)

PLATO: THE MAN AND HIS WORK
£1 1s. *net.*

PLATO: TIMÆUS AND CRITIAS
6s. *net.*

ELEMENTS OF METAPHYSICS
12s. 6d. *net.*

TILDEN (William T.)

THE ART OF LAWN TENNIS
Revised Edition

SINGLES AND DOUBLES
Each illustrated. 6s. *net.*

THE COMMON SENSE OF LAWN
TENNIS

MATCH PLAY AND THE SPIN OF THE
BALL

Each illustrated. 5s. *net.*

TILESTON (Mary W.)

DAILY STRENGTH FOR DAILY NEEDS
Thirty-fourth Edition. 3s. 6d. *net.*
India Paper. *Leather,* 6s. *net.*

TRAPP (Oswald Graf)

THE ARMOURY OF THE CASTLE OF
CHURBURG

Translated by J. G. MANN.
Richly illustrated.

Limited to 400 copies.
£4 14s. 6d. *net.*

UNDERHILL (Evelyn)

MYSTICISM. *Revised Edition.* 15s. *net.*

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT AND THE
LIFE OF TO-DAY 7s. 6d. *net.*

MAN AND THE SUPERNATURAL
7s. 6d. *net.*

CONCERNING THE INNER LIFE
2s. *net.*

THE HOUSE OF THE SOUL 2s. *net.*

VARDON (Harry)

HOW TO PLAY GOLF

Illustrated. *Nineteenth Edition.*
5s. *net.*

WELD-BLUNDELL (Dom B.)

SELF-DISCIPLINE AND HOLINESS
5s. *net.*

WILDE (Oscar)

THE WORKS

In 16 Vols. *Each* 6s. 6d. *net.*

I. LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME
AND THE PORTRAIT OF MR. W. H.

II. THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

III. POEMS

IV. LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

V. A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

VI. AN IDEAL HUSBAND

VII. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING
EARNEST

VIII. A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES

IX. INTENTIONS

X. DE PROFUNDIS AND PRISON
LETTERS

XI. ESSAYS

XII. SALOME, A FLORENTINE
TRAGEDY, and LA SAINTE
COURTISANE

XIV. SELECTED PROSE OF OSCAR
WILDE

XV. ART AND DECORATION

XVI. FOR LOVE OF THE KING
5s. *net.*

XVII. VERA, OR THE NIHILISTS

WILLIAMSON (G. C.)

THE BOOK OF FAMILLE ROSE
Richly Illustrated. £8 8s. *net.*

Methuen & Co. Ltd., 36 Essex Street, London, W.C.2

COLONIAL EDITION